

# RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

## *LESSON NINE:*

### *THE LAYING ON OF HANDS*

The laying on of hands was used in various contexts in the early Church: for blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. The practice was by no means a new invention by the Church – it was a rather common practice in Judaism and in the religious history of the entire Israelite nation.

This is not the privilege of the *laity*. It is a duty specifically assigned to God's true ministers for the purpose of opening the passage of Holy Spirit, in whatever measure, from God to the individual believer. It is a requirement in the process of salvation. We will look at this very closely in this study. You need to be aware of this information.

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Scriptures in this work are quoted from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted. The author changes terms like “thee,” “thou,” “thine,” and other 17<sup>th</sup> Century expressions to more modern terms.

Unless otherwise stated, all definitions for Greek terms are from the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (University of Chicago Press, 1957; abbreviated as *BAG* in text). All definitions for Hebrew terms are from the Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999 – reprinted from the 1906 edition by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston; abbreviated as *BDB* in text).



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# SCRIPTURAL ADMONITIONS

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Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head ... and his left hand upon Manasseh's head ... and he blessed them that day. (Genesis 48:14-20)

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:18)

Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given to you ... with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. (1 Timothy 4:14)

When they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)



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# Introduction

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The laying on of hands was used in various contexts in the early Church: for blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. The practice was by no means a new invention by the Church—it was a rather common practice in Judaism and in the religious history of the entire Israelite nation.

The idea contained in the practice was that there is signified a transference of certain spiritual qualities from one person to another—assuming, of course, that the person has the *right* and *authority* to transfer those certain qualities to someone else. It appears that the practice involves a divine warrant that God honors—even requires—the laying on of hands in order for those things to be authenticated, justified, and guaranteed.

It necessitates, therefore, that we look at this practice as it is described in God’s word so we can understand what God expects of us relative to it. Before we get into the study itself, we need to get a sampling of its meaning based on the four scriptures cited above as “Scriptural Admonitions.”

## Where did the Practice Begin?

If you get technical about it, Genesis 2:7 could be the first time in human history for the laying on of hands. The creative energy of the Lord God is transferred to some clods of earth to mold the first human into a physical form. The word formed is translated from the Hebrew term yatsar—which means to mold something into a form by squeezing it

into shape.

The Lord God made a lump of clay from clods of earth and used His own body form as the model for the body of the new human (see Genesis 1:26, 27). When He had finished laying hands on this form to cause it to become flesh, He performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on it to cause it to become a living, breathing being (Hebrew = *nephesh*).

I have no idea that the practice of laying on of hands came from an ancient religious rite that imitated that creative act by the Lord God. The most I will venture to say in that regard is that it would not surprise me if that were the case. I have no supporting proof for the idea.

Here is something that is known about the practice. Its significance is derived from the hand itself. Anytime the laying on of hands is employed, it is always with an *open* hand. The Hebrew term for that is *yad*. This is different from the *closed* hand (fist), which is *kaph*. While both have to do with power, you should be able to see the difference between the power of the open hand and the power of the fist.

In his inaugural speech in January of 2009, President Obama said to the Islamic world that the United States would extend the *open* hand to them if they would *unclench their fists* toward us. The symbolism in that statement is rich with meaning. It is also significant that during the 1960s, the symbol of Black Power was the *raised, clenched fist*—but there were so many other clenched fists during that tumultuous time.

So, *yad* (the open hand) indicates two things: (a) beneficent power and (b) agency—that is, one through whom something is accomplished. It is in this context that we must understand the idea of the transference of certain qualities or blessings from one person to another—as well as the idea of that person having the right and authority, as an agent of a given source, to extend the open hand. For example, the idea

of sitting on someone's right hand (see Hebrews 1:13) symbolizes the transference of some degree of power, authority, agency to the one granted that privilege.

In Genesis 48:14-20, we find one of the first mentions of the laying on of hands in scripture. As I said before, I think that it is safe to conclude that this was something that was generally known in the ancient world. Just because scripture mentions it for the first time in a given context does not mean that it was not widely practiced before that time. In this case, it is probably the peculiarity of the situation that causes it to be mentioned first.

It was the normal practice to bless the eldest son—unless, of course, God directed otherwise or circumstances prevented it. See Genesis 17:15-21 and 1 Chronicles 5:1 for examples. Here, Jacob is adopting Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his very own sons (vv. 3-6). They were to be counted as *Jacob's* heirs, not Joseph's.

When Jacob was about to pronounce his blessing upon them, Joseph placed them in front of Jacob so that Jacob's right hand would be upon Manasseh, the firstborn, and his left hand upon Ephraim, the second-born.

But, for some reason attributed only to divine guidance, Jacob crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim with his right hand and Manasseh with his left—which, in effect, put Ephraim in the inheritance position of the first-born. Since Jacob was near blind, Joseph attempted to correct what he thought was a gross error. Jacob's answer was indicative of his awareness of divine guidance: "I know, my son, I know." And he explained to Joseph how each would be blessed. You can see in Jeremiah 31:9 how, centuries later, God inspires Jeremiah to refer to Ephraim as the *Lord God's* firstborn.

So, this employment of the laying on of hands is an example of its use to transfer a blessing from one person to another.

## New Testament Understanding

Mark 16:18 lays out one of the gifts bestowed upon true believers: laying hands upon the sick. James 5:14-16 gives us a picture of how this duty is divided between the ministry and the laity. The sick are to call for the elders (ministers) of the Church for the purpose of: (a) praying over them and (b) anointing them with oil. The anointing with oil serves two functions: (1) the laying on of hands and (2) the transference of the healing Spirit of God (symbolized in the oil). This is part of the transference of God's beneficence to the one who is sick.

The duty of the sick and those who are not ordained is to join in with the effectual, fervent prayers of faith. The confession of faults, both by the sick and others, helps to bring mental and physical relief—and the feeling of being forgiven of spiritual or physical sins can create a renewed vigor for life.

Elwood Worcester and Samuel McComb wrote in their book *Body, Mind and Spirit* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1931, p. 308):

It is now an ascertained fact that, other things being equal, the sick person who prays for himself and has others pray for him has a better chance of recovery than he who refuses the hope and stimulus that prayer can bestow. Through prayer we are united with God, and this union means increase of comfort and peace, which in turn help in the process of nature's healing virtue.

If no minister is available, certainly true believers among the laity are permitted to lay hands upon the sick and pray for their recovery. *That is the exception, rather than the rule.*

In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul is giving Timothy some pastoral

instruction about the care and education of God's people. This verse points out the aspects of beneficent power, authority, and agency being bestowed upon God's true ministers by someone with the right and authority to do so. Paul draws Timothy's attention to three important aspects of his power, authority and agency: (a) the gift that was in him, (b) the prophecy involved in its bestowal, and (c) the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

The gift, no doubt, refers to the extra measure of Holy Spirit given by God to Timothy for the execution of his duties as one of God's true ministers. If he is to be counted among those listed in Ephesians 4:11-16—a spiritual educator endowed with the Spirit of God and charged with the responsibility of bringing God's people to spiritual maturity—then he must be spiritually equipped to do so. The prophecy involved is reminiscent of Acts 13:3. It points out—and appropriately so—that the selection of Paul and Barnabas was made under the direction of the Holy Spirit, which is, in many ways, the Spirit of prophecy.

In The Seventh Day Christian Assembly's ordination certificate and ceremony, it is made clear that anyone who is ordained into the office of Minister of God is: "...chosen by the will of God to be a minister of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God..." The selection of the individual to be ordained is made by the revelation and under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

In this way, the gift of the authority to perform and of the power necessary to accomplish God's will—the minister's charge and commission to become an agent for God—is consummated and put into force when hands are laid upon him by one or more (a presbytery, in this case, is a group of ministers who have an interest in the ordination of others) having the authority to transfer to him his own beneficent power and authority to act on God's behalf as one of God's agents in accordance with God's will.

Several ministers participated in my ordination—each laying hands upon me as an act of transferring special spiritual benefits upon me for the ministry I was about to undertake. The presiding minister took the lead and prayed for special spiritual endowments, wisdom, and willingness on my part to surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit—some of which also took on the tone of prophetic utterances (as some translate Paul’s comment to Timothy).

Finally, we come to the example of Acts 8:17: “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” This is the responsibility of God’s true ministers. In this case, Philip had baptized many in Samaria. I’m not sure why he did not lay hands on them when he baptized them. Perhaps it was something that, at first, was the duty of the Apostles—but ... this Philip was not an Apostle (see Acts 6:5; 8; 21:8, 9). There might be the off-chance that Philip did not know about the laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, but I think it was a duty originally reserved for the Apostles—and later, because of the growth and expansion of territories in which Christians were to be found, it became necessary for local ministers to perform this post-baptism laying on of hands.

This is not the privilege of the laity. It is a duty specifically assigned to God’s true ministers for the purpose of transferring the Holy Spirit in whatever measure from God to the individual believer. *Laying on of hands is a requirement in the process of salvation.* We will look at this more closely as we get into the study.

So, we have seen four examples of the purposes for the laying on of hands: blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. We will go into more depth and explore many scriptures to firmly fix this basic doctrine into our faith and practice. We must, by all means possible, learn to live by every word of God. We must, by all means possible, obey the revealed will of God.

If you have questions, I am willing to assist you in finding answers. You can contact me at my email address below. Also, please go to our website (also listed below) and take advantage of the array of literature we have made available to the general public free of charge and/or obligation.

You know the drill: get out your Bible, your paper, and pen/pencil; write down the scriptures and the answers to the questions provided; practice your Bible study tactics; and ask God to direct your learning in this matter. If you really want to know God's unmitigated truth, then you must desire it as much as you do food and drink (Matt. 5:6; 6:33). It does not happen by accident.

In Christ's Service,

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# Chapter One

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## Religious Ceremonies and Rituals

Some consider *sacraments* (religious ceremonies or rituals that impart divine grace) and *rites* (religious or other solemn ceremonies or acts) to be unnecessary and superficial in the salvation process. They say that all they do is add to the pomp and circumstance (ostentatious display designed to impress or attract attention) of a given church body. Baptism is considered by some to be one such sacrament; laying on of hands is another.

What is the difference between a *sacrament* and a *rite*? The definitions above give us the core ideas, but let's extend the discussion a bit further for fuller understanding. A *sacrament* is defined by most dictionaries as a formal religious act or rite held to have been instituted by *Jesus Christ*. They give the examples of baptism and the Eucharist/Lord's Supper.

Each is a *rite* that is a set form for conducting a sacrament or liturgy. For example, a worship service (a *liturgy*; *a customary form of worship*) might have a set form – but, not all church bodies conduct them in the same way.

So, the definition proffered above suggests that *Jesus Christ* instituted all sacraments and rites to be practiced by His Church. Therefore, each is etched in stone forever as *mandatory* for all true Christians to observe. *Is that true?*

Did Jesus Christ institute the New Testament baptism? No. We have already studied baptism in Lesson Eight and have learned the difference among the terms: *baptism*, *sprinkling*, and *pouring*. Did Jesus institute the *Eucharist* in Matthew 26 (see also Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13)? No. He was observing the typical *Passover* meal, but He was explaining an interpretation of it relative to His pending crucifixion.

## How do we know?

*Baptism* was instituted prior to the coming of Jesus, but He set the *manner* in which His Church is to *baptize*: complete submersion as opposed to *sprinkling* or *pouring*. We have studied this in more detail in BSC Lesson Eight. We will concentrate this part of our lesson on the Eucharist and Lord's Supper.

The *Eucharist* is the institution of taking wine and unleavened bread as symbols of the blood and body of Jesus Christ. But, the Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion among some denominations), according to typical "Christian" practice, can be observed anytime during the day or night or time of year among the various denominations of Traditional Christianity. Many base their practices on 1 Corinthians 11:26 ... assuming that the expression "...as *often* as [you do it] ..." gives one the right to do it anytime they choose ... anytime day or night. What is the *scriptural truth* about the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

One of the significant flaws in traditional practices lies in how the sacraments and rituals get separated from God's truth. For example: Many have used the expression "breaking of bread" that is found in the New Testament as a marker for the observance of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper (see Matt. 26:26).

Acts 20:6-11 is an example of the bases for their practice.

In verses 7 and 11, both references are to a common meal, **not** a religious sacrament. How do we know? Go back to v. 6. What does your critical eye tell you there? It should tell you two things: (1) Paul and his company had **already** observed the commanded days of Passover and Unleavened Bread (see Lev. 23:4, 5 and 1 Cor. 5:6-8 as compared to Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 11:17-31). Would they now in Acts 26:6-11 be observing the Eucharist/Lord's Supper as commonly practiced in modern, traditional "Christianity"? It had hardly been two weeks since they observed Passover and Unleavened Bread. Were they confused?

Notice in Acts 26:7 that the meeting and common meal were scheduled for the first day of the week. Traditional "Christianity" uses this as scriptural proof that Paul had quit observing the seventh-day Sabbath and now met on Sunday to observe the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How can we tell whether or not any of this is true (Matt. 5:17-19; 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10)?

Luke is using the Hebrew method of reckoning time. Notice Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31. What comprises a "day" cycle? Evening and Morning in that order. The seventh day began in the evening ... but the "morning" part of that day is not discussed. What does this have to do with Acts 20:7?

That meeting would have been during the evening that **began** the first day of the week. They had observed the seventh-day Sabbath during what we now know as Friday night and Saturday daytime. Do you see traditional "Christian" churches today having Saturday evening services? No. And ... Paul clearly spoke until midnight during which would have been the evening that **began** the first day of the week ... after having a common meal with them. He was to be leaving Troas during the following morning period of the first day of the week that would end at sundown by the Hebrew reckoning.

Since he was there for seven days (v. 6), he, no doubt, had observed the seventh-day Sabbath with them (see Acts 18:4). Yet, traditional “Christianity” teaches that Paul served the Eucharist/Lord’s Supper in Troas hardly two weeks after having observed Passover and Unleavened Bread. Paul had no double standard (see Rom. 3:31).

The first thing you must understand is simple: What were Jesus and His disciples observing at what is called His “last supper”? Study the entire 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. Verse 2 tells us that they were observing *the feast of the passover*. That should tell the attentive reader that they were doing what was historically common to the Jewish religion (Lev. 23:4-8). That assumes that such a feast is predicated on an event in Israel’s history that has special significance because it was originally commanded by the Lord God.

Matthew 26:17 provides us another clue: the observance of *Passover* relative to the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Here is an example of Jesus Christ’s words in John 5:46: “...Had you believed *Moses*, you would have believed *me*: because *Moses* wrote of *me*.” How do you make that connection between the *New* Testament and the *Old* Testament? This might be an odd experience for the typical layperson to figure out, but it is not difficult if you know the proper truths to bring to bear on the subject. Let’s go to *Moses* to understand what he wrote.

You can begin your search in Exodus 12. Verse 1 tells us that the Lord God gave to Moses some instructions about an important, soon-coming event regarding His intervention on Israel’s behalf relative to their nearly 430 years of slavery in Egypt (see Gen. 15:13-16; Ex. 12:40, 41).

That Lord God is the one who later became *Jesus Christ* in the flesh. Follow this scriptural chain of pre-creation events for confirmation: 1 Peter 1:18-21; Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-3, 14; Isaiah 9:6, 7; Matthew 1:18-23.

It is logical, therefore, that whatever the Lord God commanded Moses to write as laws, statutes, religious practices, *et cetera* would be God's truth and legal commandment to obey. That Lord God would eventually fulfill His pre-creation commitment to be the Savior of mankind and lead them out of sin against the most holy God. In effect, the man Jesus Christ would have solid grounds to claim that He established this event called the Feast of the Passover (read Ex. 12, 13:1-16, and Lev. 23:1-8; see also Mark 3:27, 28 re: the creation of the seventh-day Sabbath).

Pay close attention to Leviticus 23:1-8. How would you understand Christ's statement in Mark 2:27, 28 relative to Leviticus 23:1-3 and Genesis 2:1-3? Did the one who became Jesus Christ create the seventh-day Sabbath? Did He create Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Now read Exodus 12:5-14. Are the lamb and unleavened bread symbolic of Jesus Christ? That is the connection that creates the feast of the passover.

If you are not sure that such is the case, read again Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, John's revelation in John 1:29, and God's revelation in Revelation 5. How would you rightly apply this to John 1:3 and Colossians 1:3, 13-23? If you know the scriptural truth of this, then would you assume that every religious practice of mankind is acceptable to God (John 4:23, 24; Matt. 7:21-23; 15:1-9)? You would have no logical basis for doing so.

Now comes the masterstroke (the *coup de maître*)—the outstandingly skillful and opportune act. It is found in Ephesians 4:1-16. It is the requirement of spiritual unity among God's true people: one body, spirit, hope, calling, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father of all, who is above all, and in you all. That is impossible among 32,000+ different, competing, contradicting "Christian" denominations! Read Christ's prayer to the Father in John 17 and pay close attention to vv. 5, 11, 22: "...that they may one as we are" (see

also John 10:30). This speaks of the highest level of spiritual unity. Yet, you do not find that to be true among 32,000+ “Christian” denominations today.

Read John 6:27-58 where Jesus identified Himself with the manna from heaven (Ex. 16:1-30). This is symbolism—a reality represented by something. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-17 and note how Paul uses symbolism to weave the fabric of his message about baptism, spiritual meat, spiritual drink, and the accoutrements of Passover and Unleavened Bread. What is the point here?

While it is true that Jesus Christ instituted the taking of wine and unleavened bread as symbols of His shed blood and broken body at His last Passover meal with His disciples, it must be understood that, in fact, He was revealing the reality/fulfillment of the Passover symbols of the sacrificed lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread—which were fore-shadows of His sinlessness and sacrificial death (see Ex. 12:1-11; Lev. 23:4-8; Isa. 53; 1 Cor. 5:7, 8; 11:23-30).

Make note that Passover comes only once a year on a specific night after the Spring Equinox. That is “...as often...” as we are supposed to eat the unleavened bread and drink the wine.

However, there is an exception in Numbers 9:6-13. Under special circumstances, if someone has to legitimately skip taking Passover at its regularly assigned time in the first month of the year (v. 5), the Lord God has provided a “second” Passover to remedy that circumstance in the second month of the year at the same time.

If you believe the truth of the reality of the symbols of Passover and Unleavened Bread, why would you prefer to observe Easter instead? There is no commandment in scripture to do that, but there is a commandment to reject pagan religious practices (Ex. 20:1-7; Deut. 12:29-32; Jer. 10:1-16). Easter was syncretized from paganism by the “early Church fathers.”

Most congregations that reject the drinking of alcohol substitute red grape juice for the wine. They need to study Deuteronomy 14:26 regarding the words “strong drink.” *Moffat* translates that term as *liquor*, and the *New International Version* translates it as “fermented drink.” What Moses shows in this instruction is that the Lord God (who later became Jesus Christ) did not forbid consumption of that liquor among the Israelites, but He did condemn drunkenness. Most other translations use “strong drink.” The Hebrew term is shekar ... which is made of fermented grain.

Read John 2:1-11; 4:46. Do you think that Jesus made grape juice? Hardly! The Greek word translated as wine is not the same word translated as juice. Passover and Unleavened Bread are not the Eucharist. Passover and Unleavened Bread come once a year relative to the Spring equinox. You may not observe them outside of their assigned holy season ... no more that you can observe the seventh-day Sabbath on Sunday. Numbers 9:6-13 is the only official exception.

The wine and unleavened bread were very much a part of the original Passover prior to the Exodus—maybe even dating back to the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:15, 21—He killed the animals to get the skins). Jesus had foretold the coming change in John 6:28-59. All of this lends credence to the idea that Jesus Christ is the one who gave us God’s truth about the *types*, *examples*, and *symbols* about Himself in the Old Testament. In the same way, it can be said that Jesus Christ instituted the laying on of hands. It must be said, as well, that He has required its use in various ways within His Church.

It is this requirement of various things in the salvation process that galls (that is: irritates; annoys) some people—probably because they believe that salvation is by faith and grace only and no requirements can be placed upon them. They consider that imposition to be legalistic.

If that were true, then it would not even be required of

you to call upon the name of the Lord or believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! So, let's get this right. Let's understand God's revealed truth about this matter of the laying on of hands.

## The Odd Nature of Some of God's Requirements

Have you ever taken the time to read very much of the Old Testament to see the things that the Lord God—who later became Jesus Christ—required of various people in regard to covenants and religious rituals? If you think that many of them are simply stupid and weird, remember that they are the requirements of the Creator God. Who are we that we should make such judgments about what He values as proper and necessary?

So, if we see references to something like laying on of hands for blessings, healing the sick, ordinations, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we should not think that it is a strange or stupid or weird thing. It is what it is. It is what God expects it to be. Let's consider a few examples.

In Genesis 3:21, we see the Lord God doing something after Adam and Eve had fallen victim to the Serpent's deception. He took an animal (or more) and made clothing to cover their physical nakedness. These animals had only recently been created ... apparently on the sixth day before He created man (Gen. 1:24-31; 4:7). This event with Adam and Eve took place after the creation of the seventh-day Sabbath rest (see Gen. 2:1, 2). As a matter of fact, this event took place after Adam and Eve sinned (read Gen. 3:1-21). We really have no indication when this sin occurred, but it was not far removed from the creation activities described in Genesis 1 and 2.

There is nothing that directly says that a sacrament or ritual took place when this act was done. However, it is included with the "judgment" conversation begun in Genesis 3: 9 and ending at v. 24. Verse 15 includes a comment about



a “Savior Seed” that will ultimately put to death the Serpent and his “seed.”

This is an initial conversation that prophesies the coming of Jesus Christ (see 1 Pet. 1:18-20). It includes a remark about the death of the “Savior Seed” (v. 15). This “Savior Seed” was planned before the creation of the orderly universe. This event opened the proverbial “door” to a discussion with the first sinners about their pending death sentence (vv. 19-23; 1 John 3:4; Rom 6:23). Verses 19 and 22 also apply to the descendants of Adam and Eve ... v. 22 telling us by inference that they did not have inherent immortality or an immortal soul.

This paves the way for a possible answer about there being any sacrament or ritual involved in Genesis 3:21. This will be done by way of a backward projection of the facts given in Genesis 4:3-5. It is a means to take information and track it back to an unknown starting point. Hence, Genesis 4:3, 4 shows Cain and Abel making sacrifices using different media to worship God and make various appeals for His attention to their spiritual and physical needs.

These verses require some questions about the source from which such sacrifices came: (1) Were the things practiced concocted by Cain and Abel? (2) Were they things that were commanded by the Lord God? (3) Why was Abel’s sacrifice preferred above Cain’s? and (4) Can we go backward from this sacrificial experience and attach it to a past event upon which the true sacrifice might have been based?

If we can, then the slaughter of the animals in Genesis 3:21 would be the most likely source. From that, it would demonstrate why Abel’s sacrifice was preferred above Cain’s. Other significant verses would be Genesis 4:1, 2. If these two verses are connected to Genesis 3:15, it would not be beyond reason to think that Eve thought Cain was the “Savior Seed.” He was born subsequent to Adam’s and Eve’s sin, the Lord God’s prophecy regarding a Savior

“Seed,” and the sacrifice that provided the skins that clothed them, (Gen. 3:14-21).

Some translate Eve’s remark to say: “I have begotten a man, even the Lord.” That would mean that she thought the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 was intended to be quickly fulfilled ... not delayed for ages to come.

God was not appealing to their primitive nature—and later getting more sophisticated with us because we are more sophisticated. Malachi 3:6 is one of at least three places where it proclaims that the Lord God (the One who later became Jesus Christ) does not change (see also Hebrews 13:8 and James 1:17).

We must understand that this is the way by which the Lord God decided to communicate spiritual meaning to mankind at that stage of our spiritual development. To borrow an expression from Thomas Magnum, P.I.: “I know what you’re thinking.” You’re thinking that I said above that Jesus changed the Passover symbols from lamb and unleavened bread to wine and unleavened bread. And you’re wondering whether or not that constitutes change and contradicts the statements in Malachi, Hebrews, and James. Let’s see.

Some scholars say that is difficult to tell exactly what Malachi 3:6 means. In the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* I use, it treats the term as though it means “to make or become different.” The *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*—which also contains a Hebrew and Greek dictionary—gives the possibility of it meaning “being duplicitous” (saying one thing but meaning another).

While both are definitions for the term change, the Lord God does not claim that He never does anything differently or change His mind about something. It is clear from what we have studied in other lessons that He does change His mind about things (read Exodus 32 for a great example).

It would stand to reason, then, that the Lord God, there-

fore, is not duplicitous—that is, He does not deceive us by pretending to feel or act one way while doing something totally opposite to it. Nor is He a changeling. He is not like the character Odo on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* who had the ability to be whatever he wanted to be ... from a ship's bulkhead to any kind of plant, animal, or creature in the universe.

God, simply put, does not adapt Himself to be like the various “gods” of all other religions in order to, supposedly, lead the people of different religions to the same eternal reward. He is what He is (Exodus 3:14), and all of mankind must accept that (Romans 9:20, 21). You cannot re-make Him into any image that suits you (see Romans 1:18-32).

Hebrews 10:1-10 shows us that God's laws of sacrifice were to be a “shadow of good things to come.” In that sense, it represents, in a figurative way, the actuality. In the context of this scripture, it shows that the sacrifices of bulls, goats, and sheep represented the coming actuality of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. This is the advanced notice given in Genesis 3:15 when the Lord God (who later became Jesus Christ) said that the woman's male child would suffer a temporary wound ... which indicates that His death would not be permanent. It is the hope of His resurrection from the dead.

Hebrews 10:4-14 shows that His intercessory death on behalf of sinful mankind would take the place of the Law's demand for the sacrifices of the animals and establish the eternal law demanding that one's sins will be removed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the basis for the New Covenant/New Testament in His blood (vv. 15-23), instead of the blood of animals.

Think about the term fulfill as used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:17-20. But, please do not think like many do and relate it to “filling to the full.” That sounds like you are putting something into a container until it almost overflows.

Fulfill can mean either “to put something into effect,” “to meet the demands of,” or “to bring something to an end.” Many believe that Jesus Christ brought God’s law to an end. Hebrews 10:4-14 does not at all indicate that. Far from it (consider Heb. 10:14). He, in fact, met the demands of the law by putting upon Himself the demand of the law that sin must receive the death sentence (Rom. 6:23). He had figured out that problem before the creation of the orderly universe (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

In Romans 10:4, where Paul says that “...Christ is the end of the law...,” he uses the Greek term telos, which means “the end or goal toward which a movement is being directed; outcome.” According to Hebrews 10:4-14, we should understand telos to mean “the goal toward which the Law was directed.” If we ended God’s Law, there would be no such thing as sin (1 John 3:4; Rom. 5:12, 13; 6:23).

Understand this very clearly: Galatians 3:24 shows that the goal of the Law is to bring us to Christ. Not only does it bring us to the person known as Jesus Christ—the only “...name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved...” (Acts 4:12)—it also brings us to the kind of mind that He has (compare 1 Corinthians 2:16, Galatians 2:20; 4:19, and Philippians 2:5 to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Very few believe that He actually puts the true, spiritual meaning of the law into effect! Isaiah 42:21 prophesied that Jesus Christ would magnify the law and make it honorable. That certainly does not sound as though He would be bringing the law to an end. Matthew 5:17-19 does not lend itself to bringing the law to an end. Jesus plainly says that He did not come to destroy the law. The term fulfill, in this scripture, means that He will bring it to its true, spiritual intent—to the goal toward which it is directed (see Ephesians 1:4-12).

Read Matthew 5:21-48 and notice how Jesus says: “You have heard ... but I say....” In this, He is fulfilling Isaiah 42:21

by magnifying the law in its proper, spiritual intent. This means not only spelling out the deeper spiritual applications of God's law, but also bringing its symbolic meaning to reality.

Let's consider an example. When Jesus became the Pass-over sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7), He fulfilled the shadow of the sin offerings and sacrifices—thereby causing a change from repeated animal sacrifices to one sacrifice for all people for all times. So, Hebrews 10:9 says that He took away the first (law of sacrifice), that He may establish the second (law of sacrifice).

This means that the law of sacrifice itself still exists in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself because it was brought to its full, spiritual intent by His crucifixion. So, it appears that the things God chose to represent some future event or benefit (“good things to come”) have great, eternal significance to Him.

I am indebted to Adam Clarke for his commentary on Leviticus 16 (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, Ralph Earle, editor; Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1967; pp. 141, 158).] The bullock is a sin offering; the first ram is a burnt offering; and the second ram is a ram of consecration. What does this mean?

Placing their hands upon the bullock is symbolic of two things: (a) the animal was consecrated to God and was then considered to be proper for sacrifice, and (b) they were offering the life of the animal to make atonement for their sins in order to redeem their lives from the death they deserved because of their sins.

The Hebrew term is chattah, which means “missing the mark.” The sinner is continuously aiming at and seeking happiness, but he misses it because he does not seek it in God.

Aaron and his sons would place their hands between the bullock's horns and confess their sins by saying: “I have

sinned; I have done iniquity; I have trespassed by doing [this or that] and return to You by repentance. With this sacrifice, I make atonement.” With that confession of guilt, the animal was then considered as *vicariously* (in place of) bearing the sins of the one who brought the animal for sacrifice. Their sins would be *symbolically* transferred to the sacrificial animal. Thereby, they would acknowledge God as the Judge of men, the Punisher of sin, and the only one who can forgive and pardon sinful mankind. This would be a necessary prelude to vesting them—that is, before “filling their hands” with priestly authority during the consecration ceremony.

The person officiating at this ceremony—in this case, Moses—kills the sacrifice “before the Lord” (v.11—significantly, to the *north* of the great altar ... *symbolically* in the direction of God’s throne—read Isaiah 14:12-14). He then dips his finger in the blood and (a) anoints the horns of the altar (the four directions N, S, E, W), (b) dumps the remainder of it at the base of the altar, (c) burns certain inward parts on the altar, and (d) burns the flesh, hide, and dung outside the camp. Nothing was eaten. The blood was a “covering for sin”; therefore, it *symbolized* the work of Jesus Christ as our perfect sacrifice for sins (read Isaiah 53, 2 Corinthians 5:10-21, and Hebrews 9:19-28). But, what about placing their hands on the two rams?

The first ram was not a sin offering (a *chattah*). It was a burnt offering (Hebrew = *owlah*). Aaron and his sons had to lay their hands on the head of this sacrificial animal, too. Notice in vv. 15-18 that this ram is slain, and its blood is sprinkled around and upon the altar. It is then cut into pieces, and the innards and other parts are washed. Finally, the entire ram is burned up completely—everything, as it were, was for *God’s* consumption, not man’s.

As it turns into smoke and rises into the air, it is expressive of the complete and full sacrifice of Jesus Christ—because that is the only thing that could make atonement for

the sins of the world. The smoke is representative of Christ's ascension in *spirit* to the throne of God (read Acts 1:9).

It is also described as a sacrifice for praise and adoration of God. Laying their hands on this animal was also a *symbol* of transferring their own lives to this animal to represent their own complete and full surrender to God for His service. [Aborigines, like the Native Americans, have used a similar type of this symbolism when they have smoked the “peace pipe” with others in discussing and making treaties with one another. The smoke represents “spirit”. Smoking together from the same pipe represents “in one spirit”.]

The second ram is the peculiar one with regard to what God required of them. Again, Aaron and his sons lay hands upon the head of this sacrifice. It is called a ram of consecration (v. 22)—which means that it is the sacrifice for their ordination as priests of God. The blood is used similarly to the blood of the bullock and the first ram—but ... with one unusual exception. Some of the blood was to be put upon the tips of the priests' right ears, right thumbs, and right big toes. What? Doesn't this brink on the verge of stupidity? Remember that the *Lord God* is requiring this of them. It is steeped in spiritual meaning and symbolism. I know what you're thinking: Why this?

What do we do with our ears? Hear/listen. What about our hands? Typically—work. And our big toes? *Balance* as we go about our business. The right side is typically the side of great prominence and intimacy (read Hebrews 1:1-3, 13). They are symbolically being consecrated to service at the right hand of God—dedicating all of their faculties and powers to the service of God: (a) their ears to the hearing and study of God's word; (b) their hands to diligence in the sacred ministry and to all acts of obedience; and (c) their feet to walking in the way of God's thoughts and ways.

All of this also presupposes that God will provide them with the spiritual discernment and wisdom they will need to

serve as His priests among His people. None of this would be possible without the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood—a symbol of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

There were several types of sacrifice included in this consecration: (a) *milluim*, which means “to fill,” (b) *terumah*, which is a heave offering, (c) *tenupha*, which is a wave offering, and (d) *mincha*, which is a thank offering.

First of all, Exodus 29:22 calls this ram an *eil milluim*: “the ram of filling up.” This worked two ways: (a) the person to be consecrated to God has his hands filled with a particular offering appropriate for the situation, and (b) he leaves the presence of God with his hands filled with authority and power from God Himself to act on His behalf. If there is any aspect of “filling to the full” in this ceremony, this is it. Verses 19-28 describe the *tenupha*, the *mincha*, and the *terumah*.

The *mincha* in this case consists of three different types of unleavened bread: (1) *matstsoth*—the unleavened loaf, (2) *challoth*—prickly, perforated cakes, and (3) *rekike*—an extremely flat wafer. They and the choice rump and other parts of the ram were waved (*tenupha*) before the Lord God—moved back and forth from the right hand to the left hand in a waving motion as an acknowledgment that the bread that sustains our lives and the mercy of God that brings to us salvation comes from God alone (read John 6:31-58 to see the fulfillment of these symbols of bread, meat, and blood).

All of this is intended to acknowledge God as Creator, Governor, Provider of every good and perfect gift, and Preserver of all things—a shadow of the coming salvation and reconciliation of all things to God through Jesus Christ. All of this is then burnt before God as an *owlam* (v. 25).

The breast portion is a *tenupha*—a wave offering—that is to be eaten by Moses (v. 26). The shoulder is a *terumah*—a heave offering that is both waved and heaved. Being heaved, it was moved up and down. This was an offering of firstfruits acknowledging God’s goodness as Provider



(waved), but it was also lifted toward heaven as an acknowledgment of their dependence upon God for His bountiful provision of meat in due season and their obligation to God for His continual and liberal supply of all their wants and needs (read carefully Matthew 6:19-34).

If you understand the point I am making here, then you can understand the connection these sacrifices have to Jesus' statement in John 5:39: "Search the scriptures [in this case, the Old Testament]; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they *which testify of me*" (emphases added).

Such is also the case with the *laying on of hands*. We must not allow ourselves to disdain these things simply because we consider them to be unnecessary, stupid, weird, inconvenient, or primitive. They have special meaning to God Himself. Whatever they mean to Him, that is what they should mean to us—regardless of the odd nature they might otherwise have.

After all, the Lord God took the clay into His *hands* and created the *form* that man would have. He then breathed the breath of life into him in order to bring to life the first human being (giving him "spirit"—that is: mind power (see Job 32:8). Is this the precursor to laying on hands for the receipt of "holy spirit" (see Rom. 8:9-17; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Why didn't He simply "speak" man into existence like He did everything else (see Ps. 33:9; 105:31, 34)?

In one way or another, all of this we have discussed here relates to the coming of Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for our sins in order that we might be presented to God as His children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4-14 and Heb. 2). How, then, can we disdain the very things God has inspired to testify of His truth in Christ? That is a very dangerous position and attitude to take! It is a serious matter to claim that Jesus Christ's death did away with God's Law!

## Review Questions

1. Genesis 3:21: What do you think is the significance of this verse relative to the sin of Adam and Eve? How do you suppose the Lord God got His hands on some animal skins in order to make some clothing for them? Did He kill them? In doing so, did He conduct anything we could consider as a sacrament or ritual? What meaning might He have attached to it? Think seriously about this situation.
2. Genesis 4:3, 4: Why did Cain and Abel begin the practice of sacrificing to the Lord God? From where did they acquire, or learn, the practice? Was it from what happened in Genesis 3:21? Does it appear to be stupid or weird that someone would set on fire some vegetation or animals to worship God? Does God appear to have a preference for a particular type of sacrifice? Why or why not? (Read also Hebrews 11:4.)
3. Hebrews 10:1-10: Was the original law regarding sacrifices a “shadow of good things to come”? If a *shadow* is a type, example, or symbol, what did the sin sacrifices and offerings symbolize?
4. Was there a change that took place in the sacrificial system? Why do you suppose that change took place?
5. How do you think this might have related to Genesis 3:21?
6. Exodus 29: Look up the definition of the terms *consecrate* and *ordain* (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33- 35). The Hebrew term is *yad* (discussed in the Open Letter above). Who is responsible for the authority and power part of this exercise (see 25:1 and follow the references to *thou*)? (Read Exodus 3 to see where he [*thou*] was vested with this authority and

power.)

7. What do you think is happening when he consecrates Aaron and his sons (v. 9)? Will he lay open hands upon their heads?

8. What does it mean that Aaron and his sons would be made or declared sacred? Look up the definition of *sacred* and apply the definition to this situation.

9. Is all of this done by the commandment of the Lord God? Was Israel to have a special regard for Aaron and his sons as a result of this event? So, this was *God's* law and not *Moses'* law? What is the difference? Why is that an important question?

10. Now, read again vv. 10, 15, and 19. Why do Aaron and his sons put their hands upon the heads of the animals to be sacrificed?

11. Are you beginning to see the significance of the *laying on of hands*?



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# Chapter Two

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## The Nature of Christ's True Church

**R**ead carefully the following quotes because they represent a momentous declaration that changed the face of traditional “Christianity.”

If it is objected that the church of the N.T. knows nothing of a *priesthood* parallel to that of the sons of Aaron within Israel, it is well to recall that the dedication and consecration to a priestly office pertains to *every church member* received into full communicant membership, and that the Christian ministry is a vocation within *the universal priesthood of the whole Christian church*” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2, 1953 edition, p. 42; emphases added).

This idea is not unlike a prominent denomination’s statement of beliefs:

The priesthood of believers grants every Christian *the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for himself as he is led by the Holy Spirit. **But said interpretation must be in harmony with the overall teachings of the Bible.*** And it must adhere to the

revelation of God in Jesus Christ, for the Holy Spirit neither contradicts himself nor denies God's revelation in His Son (*The Baptist Faith and Message*, Herschel H. Hobbs, Convention Press, 1971).

I think we need to understand the following three points: (a) the current role of true Christians *before* the establishment of the Kingdom of God, (b) the role of those serving in the true ministry of Jesus Christ *after* His return, and (c) the future role of all true Christians.

### Are all Christians *Presently* Priests under Jesus Christ?

First of all, it is difficult to accept the idea of the priesthood of *all* believers in the context into which Luther and others have framed it. Why? How could such an idea apply to today's 32,000+ so-called "Christian" denominations that teach so many *contradicting* things about Christ, His gospel, and the fundamental doctrines that we have been studying? If those great *contradictory* teachings are indicative of the leadership of the *Holy Spirit* over this supposed "priesthood," then something is terribly *schizophrenic* about it! It is not at all well-organized.

Also, if Luther and others are correct, then *no one* has the right to *question or contradict* anyone else's scriptural teachings ... even if they plainly contradict *God's* revealed truth! How can that stand?

Matthew 7:21-23 plainly shows Jesus Christ condemning the "many" Christians who will have done all manner of *unacceptable* "good works" in His name against God's will. Does He also not accept their individual "priesthoods" and personal rights to read and interpret scripture for themselves?

In addition to that, there would presently exist *billions* of

independent Christian “priests” who do not agree with one another as is shown in Ephesians 4:1-16. The net result is that something is not right about this “priesthood” doctrine. Let’s consider this carefully.

That said, understand this: My quarrel is **not** whether or not we might be priests under Jesus Christ; it is that **we will not be able to interpret for ourselves what God’s truth is.** That, simply put, is **self-righteousness.** God Himself dictates His truth. Those who become His “children” through Jesus Christ must conform their wills to that of the Father (see Matt. 6:10; Mark 3:35; Rom. 8:27, 28; 12:2).

Second Timothy 2:15 lays upon each believer the responsibility to **correctly** interpret **God’s** word of truth. Arguably, Paul is directing this comment to Timothy, a minister; however, such a lesson is also generalized to the Christian congregants who are instructed to also abide by such directions. Acts 17:11 shows that the Bereans “searched the scriptures daily” to see if what they were being taught matched what **scripture** says. Luke praises them for their spiritual approach and determination to know **scriptural** truth.

Jude provides another comment that speaks volumes in this matter: “...You should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (v. 3). This presupposes that the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” has been properly identified and defined. It was not left up to the **individual** believer to **redefine** it to suit his/her own personal religious concepts.

Now read Ephesians 4:1-16. Make note of the implication of a **corporate body of beliefs.** That means that the true faith is a body of doctrines shared by what is identified as the True Church ... not the things any **single** individual decides to believe in exception to the corporate body of beliefs. Make special note of Ephesians 4:16 where Paul emphasizes the unity of the “body” working together as a **single** unit.

That unity is **God's** divine standard of practice.

That said, let's look at Revelation 5:10 and 20:6. The problem we are trying to solve is when such priesthood is to be put into effect. First, let me give you a short primer in verb tenses. The expression "am" is present tense. The expression "was" is past tense. The expression "will/shall be" is future tense. Is Revelation 5:10 present, past, or future? In other words, is it a **present** condition, a **past** condition, or a **future** condition? The context suggests a **future** condition **after** the return of Jesus Christ. It is indicative of positions in the ruling realm of God's Kingdom will prevail **after** the return of Jesus Christ.

In order to understand this correctly, you should read 1 Corinthians 15:50 where Paul speaks of "flesh and blood" not being able to inherit the Kingdom of God. He follows this with his explanation of how the "flesh" must **put on** immortality and incorruption: the ability to live forever without rotting away from age. That word kingdom is also noteworthy because it speaks of the **royal reign** of the Kingdom of God, which implies the need for a "ruling realm" of kings, lords, judges, and priests that support the King.

It is with that understanding that we can more properly understand John 3:1-13. A "rebirth" from flesh to spirit must take place. Paul clearly explains this in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 when he explains that we must "put on" immortality and incorruption (vv. 53, 54). Why? We do not presently have it (see also Daniel 12:1-3).

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul has co-opted God's plain scriptural truth (see 1 Cor. 15:46) ... especially among those who teach that "man is not a body and has a soul. He is a soul and has a body" (Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Convention Press, Nashville, 1971, p. 51). That doctrinal statement presupposes that the **real person** is already immortal ... contrary to 1 Corinthians 15:52-54. If that is also how you determine a presently-



existing “priesthood” of the believers, then someone did not get the facts straight.

These saints, who are to be resurrected to eternal, spirit life at Christ’s return, will/shall be made kings, lords, and priests in order to reign on the earth under Jesus Christ (see Rev. 5:10; 19:16; 20:6). Revelation 20:6 gives us another perspective: Those in the first resurrection, which occurs at the return of Jesus Christ, will reign with Him as kings, lords, and priests for 1,000 years. That is future tense. What does that suggest? No priesthood or any other such “royal” office is assigned until He returns.

According to the principle involved with ordinal numbers, there will be at least a second resurrection (see Rev. 20:12-15). Isaiah 2:1-5, Zechariah 14:16-21, and Revelation 20:12-15 suggest that a human population will exist on the earth for 1,000+ years after the return of Jesus Christ and will be taught God’s truth and given an opportunity to come to salvation through Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 65:17-20 indicates that, after the destruction of Satan and the rebellious angels and the creation of the new heavens and new earth, there will be a perpetual human population into eternity that will also be trained and receive salvation (see Isa. 9:6, 7 and make note in v. 7 that His kingdom will increase without end). That pre-supposes the need for a perpetual increase in the number of kings, lords, judges, and priests in the ruling realm. All of that is future, not present.

The quagmire of scriptural misinformation that has been given to a deceived world by so many individual “priests” is astounding. That doctrine fosters self-righteousness among 32,000+ denominations.

## To which Priesthood will True Christians Belong?

You should know that Jesus Christ was not from the tribe

of Levi. The Levites were the only tribe of Israel that was made to be priests (Moses, Miriam, and Aaron; Ex. 2:1-10). Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), so he would not have been a priest in the nation of Israel at any time. Paul takes up this discussion in Hebrews 5 where he reveals that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is “after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 5:1-11; 6:20; see also Gen. 14:18-24 where He is first mentioned). Paul discusses this Melchizedekian priesthood more fully in Hebrews 5-7.

He uses some very interesting reasoning to demonstrate his point ... the first point of which is made in Hebrews 5:9, 10. Jesus Christ was ordained by God the Father to be the high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Judging by 1 Peter 1:20, it would be reasonable to assume that this ordination took place when He was ordained to be the ransom sacrifice for man’s sins before the creation of the orderly universe (read Phil. 2:5-11 for another look at what happened at that time).

Paul’s basic reasoning is that Melchisedec (in essence, Jesus Christ) is superior to Levi because Levi paid tithes to Him in Abraham (Heb. 7:1-10; see Gen. 14:18-20). The lesser pays tithes to the greater (vv. 1-10). Melchisedec came before Levi was even born, so His priesthood has seniority over Levi’s. Make note of Paul’s description in Hebrews 7:1-3—especially v. 3. That is an apt description of Melchisedec, King of Salem (“Prince of Peace”). That certainly shows superiority over the Levitical priesthood! What does this tell us?

Not all Christians are from the lineage of Levi. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that we would become Levitical priests. We should know from Jeremiah 33:17-21 that the Levitical priesthood will continue to serve in its assigned duties in the true Tabernacle after Jesus Christ returns (v. 18). He was the Lord God of the Old Testament who designated them to be the priestly tribe of Israel. He will be faith-

ful to His covenant with them. However, the Melchizedekian priesthood will be a higher order of priesthood than the Levites. The Melchizedekian priesthood will be part of the ruling realm of the entire Kingdom of God beginning at Christ's return.

After learning this scriptural truth, how would the "individual priesthood of the believer" doctrine work in such an organized ruling realm? *That Protestant doctrine does not even work well among billions of Christians making up the 32,000+ denominations among us today!*

## The Example of the Nation of Israel

Leviticus 1 gives us an example of the relationship between the people and the priesthood. Verses 1-9 show the man taking his sacrifice to the Tabernacle and consecrating it (setting it aside for holy purposes) as an atonement offering. In v. 5, the man kills the bullock in the presence of the Aaronic (Levitical) priests at the door of the Tabernacle. Only the lineage of Moses and Aaron could be priests. Only those priests in the lineage of Aaron could become the High Priest.

That appointment by the Lord God made Israel a nation that had a lineage of priests. Were they allowed to do things according to their own personal interpretations of the Lord God's commandments? Take time to read how the Levitical priesthood was established and note who was in charge of constructing the commandments about how they would ply their priestly "trade."

The priests were to collect the blood of the sacrificial animal and sprinkle it upon the altar. Then, the man was to cut up the bullock into various pieces and parts (vv. 8, 9). The Aaronic priests would then put them upon the altar fire as a burnt offering to God. That is information that demonstrates the existence of a priestly class among Israel: from

among the tribe of Levi. The man, in this case, acts as a participant, not as a priest.

That is not much different from how our relationship with Jesus Christ works: We go to God the Father in prayer and ask Jesus Christ, our High Priest, to intervene on our behalf to make our prayers heard by God the Father (see 1 John 2:1, 2; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus Christ is our advocate (Greek = *parakletos*—advocate: one who supports by pleading in favor of someone).

The gift of God’s Holy Spirit (which we will discuss in a later chapter) is also the work of our Parakletos, Jesus Christ (see John 14:15-18; 16:7-15). Outside of Jesus Christ, there is no other *Parakletos*. He gives to us the Spirit of Truth (Holy Spirit) so we can be worthy of His intercession by living holy lives (see 1 Cor. 2:6-16; Eph. 1:4, 13, 14).

Read Exodus 19:5, 6. Verse 6 shows the Lord God telling Moses (a Levite; older brother to Aaron), while he was up in Mt. Sinai with the Lord God, that the nation of Israel would be “...a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Israelites were not yet privy to this conversation. Please note the separation of the priests and the citizens of the nation.

But, does that statement sound similar to the idea of the individual priesthood of believers? Does the Lord God’s statement imply that every man, woman, and child of the nation of Israel would be an individual priest unto the Lord God? You need to consider how such a thing would operate in the imperfect world. You should remember this: This is the beginning of the Lord God’s attempt to establish Israel as His “wife”.

It is commonly thought among commentators that verse 6 is an explicit statement by the Lord God that all Israelites would constitute a divine priesthood under God. Some say that the people were responsible for presenting their own sacrifices to God before the Levites were made to be the priestly tribe of Israel. Whether or not those who make such

claims have been influenced by Luther and others, I cannot say. What I can say is simple: Exodus 19:22, 24 speak as though there already existed some kind of priesthood among the Israelites.

Now consider Exodus 20-23. These were the things the Lord God gave to Moses to present to Israel as part of the pending covenant agreement. Exodus 24 begins another trip up Mt. Sinai for further instructions. Much of this has to do with building the Tabernacle and setting aside the Levitical priesthood, with Aaron as High Priest. That occurs in Exodus 28, 29. The remainder of Exodus describes more laws for setting up the theocratic government of Israel. Why have I given you this information? Who is giving the laws? It is a very simple question to answer.

Exodus 19:6 is a statement about a future event. The rest of Exodus describes how that future event was to be unveiled and brought reality. All of Israel was expected to be a holy people with holy laws and holy expectations (Deut. 4:1-13). That is no less true of those who are supposed to be true Christians. The maintenance of the holy expectations of the Lord God was placed into the hands of Moses, Aaron, and the sons of Aaron ... along with the heads of each tribe and their judges. The holy expectations of Ephesians 4:1-16 are no different today from what the Lord God anciently expected of Israel.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16 and pay attention God's assigned ministry. Read 1 Corinthians 12 and note that individuals within the "body of Christ" are given various "gifts" of the Spirit, but they operate as a single, united "body" of Christ (v. 27). However, notice again that God has set in place a structure of ministries who are called to be the administrators of God's government among the "body of Christ." Whether or not this is a type of "priesthood" is difficult to say ... but it is obvious to say that their offices indicate governing authority among God's people at present. Why?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33, 37-40. Part of the administrative authority of the ministry is to maintain decency and order in the true “body of Christ.”

While the introductory quote from Luther indicates that the New Testament reveals a priesthood that parallels that of the sons of Aaron, it fails to remember the specific statement by Luther and others that posits that each individual Christian is presently a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret scripture for himself/herself.

Implied, but not stated, is the conclusion that your faith is a personal thing not attached to the corporate (one body) responsibility. The Lord God did not imply any such thing for Israel’s “priesthood.” Exodus 19:8 reveals that the Israelites accepted the corporate (one body) responsibility. The hymn *Onward, Christian Soldiers* makes the same claim when it speaks of Christians being one body: one in faith and doctrine, one in spiritual liberty. Are they? Sadly, no. They have drunk too deeply from Luther’s “well.”

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-40 and see if you understand the “one body” concept. Was there room left for individual interpretations of what the Lord God meant relative to specific commandments? God planned for Israel to become an exceptional, spiritual nation for His glory—one that would be a beacon of true spiritual light on God’s behalf. Individual partisanship and factions threatened the spiritual unity God demanded. Why? Individual sovereignty.

Read Deuteronomy 4:5-10. Moses lays the following responsibility upon the people: (a) learn God’s laws and observe them; (b) be faithful to God in all you do; (c) be a faithful example to those not in the true faith; and (d) teach them to your children and grandchildren so that future generations will also know them and live by them as they were intended to be known and interpreted. The goal and purpose of that instruction was to enforce the “one body” concept of belief and practice.

In verses 32-40, Moses shows them that the instruction they were to receive was to be very special instruction that no other nations were capable of receiving from their false gods; so, Israel was to be diligent in learning this instruction and living by it. The net effect was to be that other nations would hear of this God and His laws and become curious about how they might be included in such a relationship. This is the prelude to the fulfillment prophesied in Isaiah 2:1-5—which we will discuss in more detail later.

The idea is simple: while God did designate the *Levites* to be the *priests*, the entire nation had a *corporate* responsibility to maintain themselves as a spiritually *unified* holy nation. Moses and Aaron had the authority to maintain the “one body” nature of God’s holiness. With that holy, corporate behavior, they would have been a holy guiding light to all other nations. Had they done that as God willed it to be done, His Kingdom might have been established long before now.

But the rise and fall of each succeeding generation opened up the possibility of the nation going astray—of being lured away by the beliefs and practices of the ungodly (vv. 23-31; see also 5:29). Each succeeding generation had the same responsibility laid out in vv. 5-10.

The net effect was that the nation was in a *sanctified* relationship with God just like God’s appointed priests. So, every man, woman, and child had an individual responsibility to contribute to the *corporate* responsibility of maintaining—and influencing others in the community to maintain—*God’s* righteous expectations. Make note that they were to be a *holy nation* that included the priestly family of Levi.

In practical fact, the True Church of Jesus Christ is not much different in purpose and organization: There is one “body” with different “members” who perform their unique, individual functions within that “body” of Jesus Christ. Not

all of them are assigned to be the “head” of the “body”.

## Peter’s Remarks to True Christians

If you carefully check Peter’s comments in 1 Peter 2:5-10, you will see that he is quoting scriptures when he makes his comments about the nature of God’s True Church. Notice especially vv. 6-10. The order in which these scriptures are quoted is as follows: Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 43:20, 21; Hosea 1:9 and allusions to Hosea 2; and Psalm 39:12.

What Peter is doing, apparently, is drawing a comparison of the Church to ancient Israel with regard to their covenant relationships with the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ). In order to understand the position of God’s true ministry (Eph. 4:11) among His True Church and the ordination they are to undergo, it is important to understand what Peter is doing. This will also properly explain the concept of true believers and their roles as priests—necessary because it has been greatly misconstrued.

I will be basing my explanation on a few more modern translations of Peter’s comments. For example, William Barclay’s *Daily Study Bible* translates 1 Peter 2:5 like this: “Be yourselves, like living stones, built into a spiritual house, until you become a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices...” (emphases added). The *NIV* puts it like this: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood...” (emphases added). *Moffatt* is thus: “Come and, like living stones yourselves, be built into a spiritual house, to form a consecrated priesthood...” (emphases added).

If we follow Barclay’s lead, then we should see that becoming a holy priesthood is a goal toward which God’s True Church is now working, not a goal they have already attained. The *NIV* gives the impression that it is a work in pro-



gress, not something already attained. *Moffat*, on the other hand, translates it to appear like an invitation to join a process: "...be built into a spiritual house, to form a consecrated priesthood..." (v. 5; *RSV, Modern Language, and Living* are similar).

Yet, the popular perception is that every member of the Church is presently ordained into a holy priesthood—I suppose by virtue of their confessions of faith and baptisms. I can understand how such an idea impresses upon the individual believer the seriousness of his/her position in the Church, but that seriousness is there by virtue of membership, not position. Let's see how this works.

First Corinthians 15:50 gives us an interesting clue: "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." We should focus our attention on the word "kingdom." The Greek term is *basileia*. Then we should focus our attention on "flesh and blood." What is Paul about to reveal here?

The first definition in my *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon* is this: "1. kingship, royal power, royal rule, kingdom" (p. 134). The basic concept among traditional Christians of the eternal reward for Christians is simple: When you die, you go to heaven to live in eternal bliss. That is not the "picture" that Paul is "painting" here. That is not the "picture" that is "painted" in the Bible. What does this mean?

The second definition given by *BAG* is similarly simple: "i.e. [that is], the territory ruled over by a king." Traditional Christianity overlooks this concept in favor of going to heaven. When you search through the Gospels, you will find Jesus discussing the Kingdom of God quite a bit (see Matt. 6:13, 33; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; 12:31, 32; 22:29; Acts 1:6). Many of His parables compare such-and-such to the Kingdom of God. Matthew 19:28 shows Him promising His 12 disciples that they will each have a throne over a tribe of the 12 tribes of Israel in His Kingdom. That can be compared

to the prophecy in Ezekiel 37. You can look up many more such references in an exhaustive concordance like *Strong's*.

The third definition given by *BAG* is this: “esp[ecially] the royal realm or kingdom of God.” This shows how the disciples will receive their places in the ruling realm of the Kingdom. It will be a hierarchical government—arranged according to rank and responsibility. You can see that kind of distribution of power foretold in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27. What else?

In Revelation 11:15 and 19:16, we see Jesus Christ being pronounced as becoming the “King of kings and Lord of lords” and ruling over the entire earth. That is corroborated by Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13-27; Isaiah 2:1-5; and Zechariah 14:9. The prophetic nature of these scriptures shows that Jesus Christ has not yet taken that seat of power. First Corinthians 15:24-28 corroborates Revelation 20:5, 6 and Revelation 21, 22. At the end of 1,000 years of being King of kings and Lord of lords on the earth, Jesus Christ will return all power in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth to God the Father (see Phil. 2:5-11 and Col. 1:19). Who are the lords and kings?

During that 1,000-year reign, Jesus Christ will appoint the first-fruit Christians to be *kings*, *priests*, and *lords* (see Rev. 5:9, 10; 20:4). This is when we will have become that of which Peter and Paul spoke. We will occupy positions in the ruling realm of that Kingdom under Jesus Christ. That is what we at present are becom-ing based on how we use the “talents” we have been given.

At present, Jesus Christ is away on that “far journey” to receive that Kingdom ... and is yet to return to bless us according to our use of the “talents” He distributed among us before He took that journey (Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22). Because Jesus is our Prophet, Priest, King, and Judge, I see no reason why we will not have similar multiple duties in the ruling realm of God’s King-

dom.

## Review Questions

1. Exodus 19:5, 6 – Does the Lord God tell Moses to tell the Israelites that they would be unto Him a kingdom of priests? What conditions did they have to meet?

2. Based on what you now know, was every man, woman, and child in Israel a priest? Again, based on what you now know, did the Lord God designate one tribe to be His priests? Did Israel ever become a nation in which everyone was a priest?

3. 1 Peter 2:5-9 – How are Peter’s remarks to True Christians similar to Moses’s remarks to physical Israel? Does it appear that he is telling God’s True Church that they are being offered the same unique position and relationship that was offered to Israel—who, through their disobedience and failure to keep covenant with God, lost their unique position and relationship with Him?

4. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – Is it safe to say that God’s Church is not presently a spirit-composed family? Would you conclude that the Church, therefore, is being built into a spiritual family that is capable of marrying an eternal Spirit-being and inheriting an eternal Kingdom?

5. Compare 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3, Revelation 5:8- 10, and Revelation 20:4-6 – Is all of this information cast in the future tense? What three positions will True Christians occupy in that future Kingdom? Kings? Lords? Priests?



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# Chapter Three

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## The Corporate Church

The term corporate comes from the Latin term *corpus*. *Corpus* is Latin for body. In English we have a term that describes a *dead* body: *corpse*. It is from the same Latin term. If a business or organization is incorporated, that means that it has become a legal entity/body, usually a group of people who have the power and authority to pursue whatever specific function/business they will serve in society. In that sense, it is important that we understand the nature of the Church as being “one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 4:4a).

Matthew 16:18 shows that Jesus Christ is in the process of building His Church (Greek = *ekklesia*; see also 1 Pet. 2:1-10). What is that *ekklesia*? Acts 7:38 (KJV) gives us a clue: “This was He, that was in the church in the wilderness...”. Stephen rightly revealed that Jesus Christ was the Lord God among the *ekklesia* in the wilderness as Israel was being led by the Lord God out of Egypt into the promised land.

The Greek term derives its meaning from the combination of its parts: ek (meaning “out from and to”) and kaleo (meaning “to call”). It is widely understood to mean: “the ones called out [from one thing to another].” It is true that the term does not exclusively apply to God’s True Church. It also has a wide range of non-religious meanings. It could also apply to those who are called out for military service.

Thus, Israel was called out by the Lord God to be moved from Egyptian slavery to their own land in Palestine. Read Genesis 15 and Hebrews 6:13-20. In Paul's account in Hebrews 6, he demonstrates that the covenant made with Abraham (whom the Lord God *called out* of Ur of the Chaldees to go to the promised area between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers to claim as an inheritance) will not be changed and cannot be changed (it is immutable). In Romans 8:14-17 and Galatians 3:29, Paul ties Christians to Abraham's inheritance (Gen. 15) as he did in Hebrews 6:13-20. Anyone, Israelite and Gentile, who is in Christ is part of the true ekklesia of God ... whatever that term means.

In the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek/English lexicon, definitions 3 and 4, it refers to the "*congregation* of the Israelites, esp. when gathered for religious purposes" and the "Christian *church* or *congregation*" (p. 240). Because we can prove a religious relationship between the Lord God and both entities, it would necessitate that ekklesia should apply to both entities.

Many commentators and theologians do not view Stephen's comment in Acts 7:38 as referring to the Church. They translate his comment to mean assembly rather than Church ... even though Matthew 16:18 uses the same Greek term ekklesia. They believe that the Church of the New Testament was newly created by Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18 as a totally different ekklesia than the Old Testament nation of Israel. Contrary to Old Testament prophecies about the Lord God's intention to re-marry Israel in the future (ex. = Hosea 2), they believe that the Christian Church will be a new "wife" for Jesus Christ. One should carefully study Hebrews 11 and focus special attention on vv. 39, 40: "...they without us should not be made perfect."

Our corporate title is The Seventh Day Christian Assembly. We do not compare ourselves with common assemblies among mankind. We compare ourselves with the ekklesia

that Jesus Christ is building: the true Church of God through Jesus Christ. How can you understand the relationship between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church? Hebrews 11:39, 40 is a step toward that understanding.

## New Testament Clues

Rather than getting into a longer, complicated discussion, let's "cut to the chase." How do I prove from scripture that God's Church was established in the Old Testament? Ask this question: Is salvation only for those who receive Christ in the New Testament context? Many say "yes" because of wrongly interpreting Matthew 16:18. They think that the context shows Jesus Christ beginning the process of creating His ekklesia. That is a wrong assumption. Why?

Take time to read and ponder Hebrews 11. Pay attention to the number of times Paul uses the expression "by faith." In what are these people having faith? Notice to whom all of this refers: Old Testament people who believed in something that cannot fail and that cannot be doubted because the thing that is promised is, cannot but be, and cannot be otherwise than as it is and is proved to be (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 4:17). As a matter of fact, the entire book of Hebrews lends itself to what this faith is about.

Now read Hebrews 10 for part of the answer to part of the Old Testament question. Can you tell how Israel is tied to the Church concept? Read vv. 16, 17. Paul cites here Jeremiah 31:31-33. This reiteration of that prophecy shows that there has been no change of mind about Israel's status in the New Testament because the New Testament is about His future "re-marriage" relationship with Israel. Paul used the same reference in Hebrews 8:6-13.

Now read Hebrews 11:40. What is so remarkable about this verse? It shows that there is something about this faith

that ties Old Testament people of faith (not just Israel) to the New Testament people of faith. How can we verify that claim?

Go back to v. 4. Who is the first person of Old Testament faith mentioned here? Abel. He was not an Israelite. If you refer back to Genesis 3:15 and 4:4, you can make a connection between the “Savior Seed” and Abel’s sacrifices. Are these sacrifices of “first-borns”? Can you connect that to Isaiah 53, Romans 8:29, and Revelation 5? Do you notice the commonality of faith expressed in Hebrews 11:1-16? Paul projects his theme backwards from his day and time to Abel. He applies verse 6 to all who make up God’s True Church (see 1 Tim. 3:15).

If I “cut to the chase” here, can you understand that the Old Testament faith expressed by the people in Hebrews 11 was faith in the “Savior Seed”: Jesus Christ? Every Old Testament sacrifice of a firstborn lamb was a symbol of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10). Faith in that would make the true believers, in essence, Old Testament Christians. In 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, Paul refers to “all scripture.” It is noteworthy to understand that Paul had only the Old Testament in an unfinished form at that time.

That is exactly how we know what Paul is arguing in Hebrews 11. Those people were, in fact, deed, and faith, Christians. The Christ is the prophesied “Savior Seed” of Genesis 3:15. That is why Paul concludes Hebrews 11 (vv. 39, 40) by saying that they and we will inherit the promises of God together when Jesus Christ returns to consummate His “marriage” to His True Church, Israel. The Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11 are part of God’s ekklesia. Exodus 19:5, 6 is the point at which the Lord God, who later became Jesus Christ, selected the nation of Israel to be His wife. Israel was His ekklesia in the wilderness (Ex. 19:5, 6; Acts 7:37-39). This was to be an eternal relationship.

Paul demonstrates in Romans 11 that Jesus Christ is in-



tent upon fulfilling the **Old** Testament prophecies about cleaning up Israel and re-marrying her (see Hos. 2:14-23; Jer. 31:27-34; 33:20-26; Ezek. 37). The “new covenant” He will make with her was the focus of His last Passover with His disciples. Read Matthew 26:26-28 and notice His comment about the “new covenant in my blood.” His death on the cross was the main means by which He would clean her up and make her suitable to be “married” to Him again. As stated above, Paul covers this in Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:12-18.

Now read Romans 11 in its entirety. When you get to v. 15, what do you find to be significant about it? Paul asserts that the reconciliation between Christ and Israel will be more significant than His divorcement from her. Why? Who is the **holy lump/root** in v. 16? **The remnant of Israel**. Are there members of Israel who will have been broken off for various reasons of lack of faith (v. 17)? Yes. Who is being grafted into the **holy lump/root** in their places? Gentiles. Why?

Because this letter was sent to a Gentile congregation, one can reasonably conclude that faithful Gentiles will be granted citizenship into **Israel** ... thereby becoming part of the Bride of Christ: God’s True ekklesia. Now read vv. 21-29. What great lesson do you learn from this? The Lord God committed Himself to a “marriage” agreement with Israel that only death could terminate. In Romans 7:1-3, Paul explains the legal mechanism (God’s Law) by which Jesus Christ and Israel are freed from the Law regarding marriage: He died; so, she is free to marry again without penalty ... and, so is He.

So, Jesus Christ, the Lord God of the Old Testament, died for the sins of His people. Because He was raised from the dead, He is not obligated to marry a **new ekklesia**. But, He is faithful to His word; so, He takes the responsibility of cleaning up Israel and making her fit to be re-married to Him. Israel will die in the baptismal pool to be symbolically

raised from their spiritual death and be suited for that re-marriage (Rom. 6:1-12; 7:1-4). As they keep faith with Him and grow in spirit and truth, they will become prepared for the moment when they will become spirit like Him (see John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:50-54) and, thereby, be fit to be re-married to Him.

Notice in Revelation 19:7-9 that this will take place after 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. She will no longer be subject to sin and death when she puts on immortality and incorruption in order to have the same kind of body He has (v. 50): **immortal and incapable of ever sinning again**. They will enjoy eternal unity of spirit as Husband and Wife.

Do you understand how the Lord's ekklesia in the wilderness eventually becomes spiritually converted through Jesus Christ, cleaned up, and returned to her rightful position as His wife (see Rev. 19:7-9)? Does this help you to better understand Jesus' parable in Matthew 22:1-14?

Now for the pregnant question: Why should I think that the Acts 7:38 term ekklesia should be Church, instead of a common assembly? Because those who choose assembly over Church do so because they do not know or understand what God shows us in His truth. Principle-centered theology is largely based on the principle that God does not lie and is not duplicitous (that is: He does not say one thing and mean or do another). Read Isaiah 8:11-20. What is the message?

## Other Pertinent Factors

Pay attention to how the Apostle Paul describes how individual members of the Church make up the corporate Church (1 Cor. 6:15-20). Verse 15 tells us that our individual purpose is to be a member of the body of Christ. The term member(s) is from the Greek term melos. It has to do with various parts of the one body (corpus): arm, leg, finger, organs, eye, brain, *et cetera*. In this analogy, Paul is com-

paring the “body” of Jesus Christ to the human body and how it functions in unity with all of its various parts and members. If we are to understand fully Paul’s analogy here, we must understand the significance of the creation of Eve, the woman ... the “body” of Adam (Gen. 2:21-24).

Notice that the woman was created out of the man ... out of his body. She, in effect, became his body (v. 23). Verse 24 says something important for understanding the point I am making: “...they shall become one flesh.” This is, essentially, a reference to the production of children. In turn, the children become one flesh with their parents. The intention is that there will be total unity in the family derived from the blending of the two parents. Jesus Christ and His True Church are the parents. The Church is a creation of Jesus Christ like Eve was created out of Adam’s rib. The “marriage” of Jesus Christ and His Wife should, therefore, be one spirit and one body.

Let me explain one from the Greek. Read John 10:30: “I and my Father are one.” The Greek term is eis. There are several definitions given for this term, but the one that specifically applies is this: “In contrast to the parts, of which a whole is made up.” The lexicon refers to Matthew 19:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:16—both of which focus on two separate entities forming a union. That union does not make them one and the same being. In other words, Jesus Christ and God the Father are not one-and-the-same Being. Read John 17:1-11.

Read Romans 12:5. What does it say? Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 20. How does Paul contrast the many parts and the one body? Read Ephesians 2:10-22. What does Paul say about Jesus Christ joining the Gentiles with Israel? How does this compare with Galatians 3:26-29? All of this speaks of spiritual unity. What is the lesson of Ephesians 4:4-16? The spiritual unity of the “body” of Jesus Christ.

Paul also uses an example relative to marriage when he speaks of taking various parts of the body of Jesus Christ and

making them members of a whore's body (1 Cor. 6:16). Revelation 17 describes a great Babylonian Harlot that has long held sway over the people of the earth. Part of her “bag of tricks” has been to infiltrate the True Church with similar “Christian” teachings in order to create a great following (see 2 Cor. 11:3, 4, 13-15). Her followers can be identified by the way they have syncretized her religious practices into a “Christian” religion. It is a “look-alike.” Counterfeiters work very hard at making their false product look, as much as possible, like the real thing.

Pay close attention to the following quote from Alexander Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*:

It was a matter, therefore, of necessity, if idolatry were to be brought in [to the True Church], and especially such foul idolatry as the Babylonian system contained in its bosom, that it should be done stealthily and in secret.

...[I]n the very age of the apostles...the Spirit of God bore this clear and distinct testimony by Paul: “THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY DOTH ALREADY WORK” (2 Thess. ii. 7). ...[A]t its first introduction into the Church, it came in secretly and by stealth, with “all DECEIVABLENESS of unrighteousness” (Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, N. J., 1916, pp. 7, 8; italicized/underlined emphases added)

In 1 Corinthians 6:16, Paul refers to Genesis 2:24 where the Lord God created a mate for Adam and declared that they would be “one flesh” even though they were separate individuals. Then, in v. 17, he uses that analogy to declare that: “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with the Lord.” He says a similar thing in Ephesians 4:4-16. All of

this is the same meaning as “one” in John 10:30.

Why bring this up? The assumption that “Christianity,” as it exists today in the form of 32,000+ different denominations that do not agree in hope, doctrine, and spirit, makes up the one body of Jesus Christ, that is: the “Wife.” They cannot do so because of the vast differences in the so-called hope, doctrine, and spirit. Paul, in fact, strongly discourages the denominationalizing of the “body” of Jesus Christ. Why? That does not make them “parts” of the “whole.”

Paul asks a most important, relative question in 1 Corinthians 1:13. This introduction to his letter to the Corinthians indicates that the Church was experiencing schisms, heresies, divisions, and denominations (vv. 10-12). In v. 13, he asks the most poignant question: “Is Christ divided?” He experienced this and other similar problems in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica ... each having its own divisive problem with false gospels and false Christs. All of this and succeeding problems has left us today with 32,000+ separate “Christian” denominations that are not “one body.” “Christ” has, in fact and deed, been divided.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-31, Paul explains how this single, unified “body” is supposed to work. He admits that there are diversities of gifts, administrations, and operations within the one “body,” but he is also careful to show that they engage in those different kinds of bodily functions “by the same spirit” (vv. 3-13). Verses 14-24 explain how the different “members” work together for the unity of the one “body.” Read v. 25 carefully. Pay attention to the word schism. What does this mean?

This word is from the Greek term schisma, which means “division, rent, schism.” Relative to the body of Jesus Christ (that is: the True Church), there should be: (1) no breaking up into independent parts, (2) no causing holes or gaps by tearing apart, and (3) no split-ting up because of a difference

in opinion or belief. Ephesians 4:4-16 is the official description of the single-spirit unity that Jesus Christ expects of those who wish to be part of His “Wife.” The 32,000+ “Christian” denominations do not meet that criterion. That is a standard by which Jesus Christ judges His “wife.”

If Christ is the Husband and the Church is the Wife (Eph. 5:22-32), then there should be no such differences among Jesus Christ’s true people (note Eph. 4:30-32). Jesus Christ has one wife, not 32,000+. That one wife must be in spiritual unity with her Husband. It follows, then, that the members of the one body would not break up into any kind of entity outside of the criterion of the “one body” concept. That unity does not exist with 32,000+ competing, contradicting “members.” That does not meet the principle or standard given by Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6 by which Church cohesion (the action or fact of forming a united whole) is judged or decided.

## The Role of the Laying on of Hands: The One Spirit

In Acts 8:5, a man known as Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8; *aka*: Philip the Deacon) went into Samaria to preach the gospel. Those who were converted were baptized, but did not have hands laid on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit (see vv. 14-16). The Apostles in Jerusalem heard of this situation and sent Peter and John to correct the matter (vv. 14-17).

What is the purpose for the laying on of hands? Simply put, it is the means by which God’s true people receive the same spirit. There is only one true source for holy spirit: God. Read 1 Corinthians 2:5-16. Verse 5 declares that our faith should stand only in the power of God. Verses 6-8 tell us that those who are imbued with this “power” of God (filled with or saturated with a certain quality or principle) possess a “hidden wisdom” not possessed by the average

person of the world.

We are told in vv. 9-13 that God must fill our minds with His power to know and understand the things of God that do not reside in the minds and hearts of the ordinary person. Verse 16 likens it to having the mind of Jesus Christ. It is not given to us in one single event. As Peter puts it in 2 Peter 3:18, we have to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the training of your mind to be holy in thought and deed.

Therefore, it is a process of spiritual growth and development of the mind that is in spiritual unity with God. If Paul is correct in Ephesians 4:1-16, then God's Holy Spirit will be the unifying factor that enables the "body" of Jesus Christ to be joined together in the same spirit.

Some people see no value in such an exercise ... just as some see no value in being baptized. Nevertheless, the scriptural record declares that both are necessary in the salvation process because of the symbolism involved. It is a representation of something intangible or invisible.

In vv. 11-16, Paul widens the scope of the "one spirit" concept by showing that God's true ministers teach the same truths of God in order that His true people will be educated, enlightened, and improved so they will not fall victim to the false teachers of the world. The Lord God commissioned the prophet Isaiah to say the following about how His truth is to be taught and learned (also pay attention to 1 Cor. 3 and Heb. 5:12-14 with this in mind):

Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. (Isa. 28:9, 10)

The officiating ministers might not be the same people all over the world, but they will have the same *spirit* of God that maintains the proper, *unified* functioning of the “body” of Jesus Christ. *That Spirit does not war against itself.*

What does the word *integral* mean? Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. What is the meaning of the term *members*? The most applicable definition is this: “a unit of structure in a body.” Does the heart (a member) operate differently from the appendix (another member)? Yes. Why? They have a different role to play in the *same* body. Paul’s underlying assertion is that we, as *members* of the *same* body, play different roles that are necessary for the proper operation and maintenance of the entire body.

Now read chapter 12 with that thought in mind. In that sense, the “body” operates by the power of *one* and the *same* “spirit.” When the “parts” of the “body” do not work in unison, then the “body” will slowly “die” if the *malfunction* is not corrected. *Sin* is an indicator of *malfunction*. So is a lack of *unity*.

You must understand that this “marriage” is a *metaphor* for the unique relationship that is to exist between Jesus Christ and the True Church. He is presently offering that unique relationship to the *firstfruits* He is calling out from the beginning of this present world until His return—popularly referred to as His second coming.

It is the same unique relationship He offered Israel. He, in fact, *metaphorically* “married” Israel (that is, that relationship suggests a *resemblance* to “marriage” between a human male and female), but she became adulterous and was divorced. The faithful Israelites (the *remnant*) who remained after that divorce are those who became the *core/holy root* around whom He began building His New Testament Church (see Isa. 1:9; 41:8-14; 49:3, 6-8; 54:5-10; 65:8-10; Hos. 2:14-20; Amos 9:9-15; Matt. 16:13-20; Rom. 11).

Jesus Christ, who was the Lord God of the Old Testa-



ment, is the Rock (the *petra*; Psa. 18:2; 28:1; 62:1; Isa. 51:1; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:4) upon whom the Church is to be founded and built, not *Peter*, the small pebble (the *petros*). This is why Peter uses the scriptures he uses in 1 Peter 2 to describe individual Christians as being individual stones built into the fabric and edifice of the *one* Church—the single, unified edifice (just like *individual bricks* are made to become a *single building*).

How does Paul describe the *unity of spirit* in Ephesians 4:3-6? Is it anywhere close to being strange to you that most “Christians” surmise that 32,000+ competing “Christian” denominations represent this *unified “body” of Christ*? Now read verses 11-16. How do these verses compare with Luther’s claim that *all* Christians are *priests* under Jesus Christ? Base your answer on Paul’s use of the word “some”. What is the difference between “some” and “all”?

## More Pertinent Factors

When Paul uses the term *you* in 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17, it is *plural*, not *singular*. He is not speaking to individuals; he is speaking to the singular *body* of believers. The corporate Church has an assigned responsibility to be holy, without blame, and loving (see Ephesians 1:4) and to be a messenger of the coming Kingdom of God (see Matt. 28:19, 20). It is God’s *field* to be constantly worked and tended—laborers doing their assigned tasks—but God is responsible for the actual growth and success of the “crops.”

Beginning with v. 10, Paul describes the corporate Church as God’s *building*. He describes himself as an expert builder (an Apostle) who has laid the only proper foundation on which the Church is to be built: Jesus Christ. Read through v. 15 and note that the building, or construction, is in *progress* – not yet completed.

Paul warns about the materials one uses to construct

God's building. Why? He says that the building's ability to survive the coming fire will depend on the quality of those materials—which are chosen by the individual workers. The fire will reveal it!

Peter, faced with a similar situation to Paul's, describes True Christians as "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5)—which would indicate the ability to survive the fire. These are important literary symbols. It is important to understand them.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, Paul describes the corporate Church as being God's *temple* in which God's Spirit resides. He warns against two things: (a) doing things that lead to the destruction of that temple and (b) having a disregard for the sacred nature of that temple. While it is true that each individual Christian must possess God's Holy Spirit, that is for making that individual a living stone that is to have its place in God's building: God's temple. And, whom would you expect to reside in God's temple? A holy priesthood with Jesus Christ as the High Priest! If there is a priesthood currently being served, it is by the ***corporate Church***, not the individuals who make up that body.

Clarke says that the reference to the Church as a house is a *metonymy*: a figure of speech using the name of one thing for that of something with which it is associated. Here are a couple of examples: (a) "You can't fight city hall" and (b) "Standing on the corner watching the skirts go by." One associates city hall with any force stronger than its opponent, and *skirts* is plainly a reference to women. In the same way, the Church is associated with a *priesthood* because of its unique position relative to God's plan and purpose: a holy temple set aside for a holy purpose.

So, where does that put us in this discussion? Jesus Christ is building God's Church—one generation after another. It is a work in progress. Those who make up the corporate body of that Church are presently receiving *training* and *instruction* to become judges, lords, priests, and kings

who will have the authority and power to judge the nations and angels during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God on the earth. While we are not presently judges, lords, priests, and kings, it is our God-given responsibility to be seriously engaged in our training. Somewhere in the future, there is a test coming that will determine whether or not we have made the cut.

Read Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27 to understand the way Christ rewards His people when He comes to set up God's Kingdom. Matthew shows that the reward consists of rulership, and Luke shows that the amount of responsibility is in proportion to how wisely you will have developed and used the gifts given to you.

Peter says that: "It is time for judgment to begin with the House of God; and if it begins with us, what shall be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17; emphasis added). What we are presently doing as stewards while our Lord is away will determine to what degree we will be rewarded when He returns. Think carefully about these things that shall be.

With that instruction, perhaps you can now understand the role of God's true ministry among Christ's Church. Is it merely a vocation among those called out to become judges, lords, priests, and kings?

What does Paul indicate will be the certainty of this (see Rom. 4:17)? There are some differences in the various translations of this verse, but they are basically similar in meaning. For examples: (a) *KJV* = "calls those things that be not as though they were"; (b) *RSV* = "calls into existence the things that do not [presently] exist"; (c) *NIV* = "calls things that are not as though they were"; and (d) *Modern Language* = "calls into existence what has no being."

So, the gist of the idea is that God plans for future events. This verse does not claim that those future events presently exist. What it claims is that they are presently planned, and

God has an unswerving determination to bring them into existence. While the individual priesthood of the believer presently exists *in potentia* (see Rev. 5:10; 20:6), it will, *in fact*, exist when the individuals inherit eternal life ... life capable of perpetuating God's plans infinitely.

Therefore, the laying on of hands for the receipt of this *unifying* "spirit" is vitally necessary for all things to be done in decency and order (1 Cor. 14:40).

## Review Questions

1. 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 – How does Paul describe the individual members of the Church? What does he mean that each individual is a *member* (figuratively speaking) the "body" of Christ?

2. 1 Corinthians 12 – Read the entire chapter so you will understand the following questions. In vv. 1-11, are a diversity of gifts given to a diversity of individuals? Would you say, then, that individual members are given different gifts from one another? Does that make them *separate* from the "body" or *integral* to it? Explain your answer.

3. Verse 12-27 – How does Paul describe the function of the various members? How does he demonstrate that, although they serve different functions, they make up one body? What does he mean that the various members constitute the body of Christ?

4. Genesis 2:18-24 – How is the union of man and woman described? What does God mean when He describes this union as being *one flesh*? Is this typical of the marriage of man and woman?

5. Ephesians 5:22-33 – Why does Paul insist on the sanctity of the marriage institution? Of what is it a representation?

6. Verse 30 – What does Paul mean that “We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bone”? Does this describe two separate entities that constitute one body – like Genesis 2:18-24?

7. Verse 32 – Explain Paul’s conclusion in light of this discussion. Is the Church’s relationship to Christ considered to be many different bodies or one single body? Why is that important to true believers?

8. Ephesians 4:3-6 – How does Paul describe the “unity of spirit in the bond of peace” that is to exist in God’s Church? Do you think that the existence of 32,000+ different, contradicting, so-called “Christian” churches fulfills this description? Why/why not? 9. Verses 11-16 – Is every member of the body of Christ (at present, His affianced Bride – not yet His married Bride; see 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Revelation 19:5-9) placed into an office of ordained ministry? What does Paul mean by the term some? Why are some put into those positions? Does it include the priesthood?

10. Compare v. 15 to 1 Corinthians 11:3. What does Paul mean that Christ is the head of His body? Is he referring to Christ as the head (a single member) of the body (another single member)—or, is he referring to Christ as the head of a marriage union? So, will Christ be married to millions of *separate* individuals, or to a *single* body bound together in spiritual unity? Do you understand the metaphor involved?

11. Revelation 19:1-9 – Does this prophecy imply that the marriage of Christ and His Church is yet future? Is the Church, at this future time, still made up of flesh and blood human beings? Explain your answer.

12. 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17 – What three things does Paul use to describe the Church? Is each a single body?

13. Romans 4:17 – What does Paul mean when he says that “God ... speaks of future events with as much certainty as though they were already past” (*Living Bible*; emphasis added)?

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# Chapter Four

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## Laying on Hands: Blessing

Let's look at a few examples of laying on of hands for the purpose of *blessing*. Some of the situations are direct references to the practice, but there are others which seem to imply, at least, an attempt to do so for the spiritual and physical well-being of people whom God is attempting to draw to Himself. Study these situations carefully so you can understand the spiritual significance of this most important doctrine of Christ from Hebrews 6:2.

It should be obvious that people had heard of the power Jesus exhibited in the use of His hands and wanted that mighty power of God to be used to bless their children. They would have considered it a great honor to have been so blessed by this very famous man.

There is no record that He uttered anything when He did this. It could have been a mere touch—probably with both hands upon their heads. More than likely, though, He probably would have uttered some kind of blessing *thought* upon each child He touched.

His disciples did not want Him to be bothered. It could have been that they felt that the requests were trivial and beneath the notice of Jesus. On the other hand, they might have noticed the toll that such things had on Him. Mark 5:30 says that “virtue went out of Him” when the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment. He was con-

scious of the fact that healing power had been released from His body. Did the constant flow of that power from His fleshly body *exhaust* Him? There is no scriptural indication that it did—only the fact that He was conscious of it when it happened.

The important lesson of Matthew 19:13-15 is obvious: Jesus felt that it was important for little children to be included in the experience. He did not want anything to be a barrier to their experience with the power of God—no barriers to their access to blessings from God. Those experiences would be valuable for their future growth and development when they would have to make decisions about their relationships to God and His offer of salvation.

While Jesus did not institute a *rite* by blessing these children, the churches in the Church of God Seventh Day tradition set aside at least one time during the year when the ministry has a blessing of little children ceremony. Prayers on behalf of the children for their protection and spiritual and physical growth and development are made. We do this because Jesus Christ set us the example (1 Peter 2:21).

I once heard someone explain the famous split-finger salute 🖐️ made by Mr. Spock on the original *Star Trek* series. Apparently, it was the idea of Leonard Nimoy, who played Mr. Spock in that series. As I remember it, Nimoy saw his rabbi make the gesture during the benediction at a Yom Kippur (Atonement) service. He peeked during the benediction prayer and saw the rabbi raise his hands and make the gesture. Later in life, Nimoy thought that it would be an interesting “alien” practice (somewhat similar to “alo-ha” in Hawaii): a greeting, a salute, a blessing, and a farewell.

The idea in Leviticus 9:22 seems simple enough: the High Priest has his hands filled with power and authority from God. Using those hands to invoke, or distribute, God’s blessings is part of the responsibility of God’s ministers. It



is a gesture of generosity. It is a gesture of grace. It is a gesture of love.

You will not find laying on of hands used every time there is a blessing uttered in scripture. You should understand, however, that the laying on of hands is a principle of the doctrine of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:1). Reading this in relationship to Hebrews 5:11-14 is necessary for better understanding. The Greek term for *principle* (*arche*) is expressive of *elementary doctrines* (RSV)—or, *beginning teachings*.

The reason Paul speaks of “leaving the principles” has nothing to do with casting them aside. Rather, it has to do with being able to comprehend them as *foundational* concepts to be learned early in the Christian faith to provide the practical support needed for the more complex doctrines Jesus Christ wants His followers to learn so they can become mature, spirit-minded Christians who worship God in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23, 24; Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:1, 2; 2:6-16).

As this happens, the individual becomes more *skilled in the word of righteousness*—as opposed to someone who professes faith in something about which he knows very little and about which he could very easily mislead others through his ignorance. This is the danger of the “Christian” whose spiritual growth and development practically stops after his profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

## Review Questions

1. Matthew 19:13-15: For what purpose were the little children brought to Jesus Christ? Does it appear from this that laying on of hands was a known practice with regard to blessings?
2. Does Jesus, on this occasion, institute the rite of blessing

little children? Would it be wrong for His Church to practice this blessing on a regular basis? Could it be done in the name of Jesus Christ—on His behalf by His ministry? Explain.

3. What relationship between little children and the Kingdom of God did Jesus cite? What is your reaction to this object lesson? Can you explain His reasoning here?

4. Leviticus 9:22: Does this example suggest that raising the hands in blessing over a group is similar to laying on of hands? Would you suppose that such a practice is used when there is a large crowd—as opposed to going out and touching each person individually? Why/why not?

5. Explain Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2, and 2:6-16. What is the significance of Hebrews 6:1, 2 in this matter?

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# Chapter Five

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## Laying on of Hands: Healing

Laying hands upon the sick does not consist of standing them in front of you and blowing on them or smacking them smartly upon the forehead. To a world that monotonously—and almost rhetorically (a rhetorical question is one that does not seek an answer: “Do you want me to beat you with a whip?”)—asks: “What would Jesus do?”, I would suggest that you look at examples of His practice. While we are looking, see if you can find any semblance of some of the bizarre antics of some widely known “faith healers.”

In Mark 6:1-6, where was Jesus Christ at the time? Verse 1 says that He was in His own part of the country with His disciples. It does not say that He was invited to do so, but He taught His fellow countrymen in the synagogue on the Sabbath. They were astonished both by His words and by the miracles that He performed. Verse 3 gives us some insight into this situation: They did *not* give Him proper regard because He was considered to be just an ordinary man who was a carpenter who had local kinfolks. Verse 3 speaks volumes: “And they were *offended* at Him.” He had merely taught God’s truth.

Because of the bad attitudes they showed, Jesus was un-

*able* to do any mighty works among them except to lay hands on a *few* to heal them (v. 5). Jesus was very surprised at this display of unbelief and lack of common courtesy.

The lesson to be garnered from this example should be easily understood: *Unbelief* is a great impediment or obstruction to the way God can and will intervene on our part. Why? *Faith* is unquestioning belief and complete trust and confidence. Read Romans 4:13-25 in order to better understand this concept. Note how Abraham did not stagger at the Lord God's promises because: "being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (vv. 20, 21). Verse 3 says that "Abraham *believed* God...."

Now consider Mark 7:31-37. Did Jesus Christ effect another *unusual* healing? What was the problem this man suffered? What did Jesus do? What was the outcome? Did Jesus seek public acclaim and notoriety? How did the *people* who were present react to this? Should Jesus have gone on television and made a big show of His power? Why/why not? Do you get the idea that Jesus did this *privately* ... but the news was leaked out to the public?

In John 9:1-38, Jesus performed a healing in the company of His disciples—not in front of the multitudes. Again, He used an odd method to get it done: He mixed His own *spittle* with some dirt and made a clay poultice. Why didn't He simply speak and command that the man be healed? Frankly, I do not know—nor is it revealed.

When He painted the man's eyelids with the clay, He commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash it off. The man could have been indignant and complained about being contaminated with His spittle and dirt, but he did as he was told and was healed.

It appears that the benefit comes from faithfully following the directions of Jesus Christ rather than from the chemical combination of spittle and dirt (regardless of how odd that might have seemed). Those who knew the man became

aware of his having been healed when he came home without assistance and spoke plainly to them. This event became part of the first verse of the hymn “Amazing Grace”: “... I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see” (v. 25).

Now look at Mark 16:9-20. I need to preface any questions from these verses with this piece of information: It is a well-documented fact that Mark 16:9-20 is *not* found in most ancient manuscripts. In a footnote in the *Living Bible*, there is speculation that they were added later as a copyist’s appendix of additional facts. According to the *RSV*, which separates v. 8 and v. 9 with an additional space:

...one authority concludes the book by adding after verse 8 the following: “*But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*”

I call your attention to this information because there are a couple of textual problems like this that you will encounter in scripture due to the number of various manuscripts that were referenced in putting together various translations of the Bible. That in and of itself does not make the truth of the Bible suspect, although it might make suspect the motives of some copyists and translators for including or excluding certain material.

This kind of textual problem has caused many to construct various theological conspiracy theories like *Da Vinci’s Code* and *A Skeleton in God’s Closet*, two fictional literary works based on such theories: (a) Jesus Christ being married to Mary Magdalene, and (b) Jesus Christ not actually being raised from the dead. Hugh J. Schoenfeld’s *Passover Plot* is an example of a serious scholarly work about the supposed conspiratorial nature of the death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ.

So, in Mark 16:9-20, my first question would be whether or not Jesus Christ intended His followers to make a regular, public display of their faith by actually handling poisonous snakes and drinking poison—like arsenic. That would appear to be a contradiction of Matthew 4:7: “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16).

The flip-side of this is simple: we have plain instruction in other parts of scripture regarding the laying on of hands. Does God’s word have a solution for this textual problem? Yes. Note carefully the following scripture: Luke 10:16-19.

To whom does Jesus address this instruction? It is addressed to His disciples ... but you have to go back to v. 1 in order to get the context of the term “disciples”. You see in v. 1 that Jesus has appointed “other seventy also”. Mark 16:14 says that the Markian event was supposedly addressed to His remaining 11 disciples (Judas was now dead). On that basis, we cannot really relate the two to one another.

Read carefully vv. 17-19. The 70 reported having had power over “...even the devils...” through His name. Jesus Christ adds something noteworthy in v. 19: “I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (emphases added). Make note of the emphases I added to the text.

What does the term tread mean? Does it have anything to do with picking up snakes and scorpions and handling them? Frankly, I think it is an extension of the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 about the Saviour Seed bruising the head of that Great Serpent Satan. Here, Jesus gives the 70 the same power to do so without harm. It does not mean to literally walk on someone. Think in terms of the thorough defeat of an enemy and afterwards saying: “We walked all over them.” It describes the thoroughness of the victory ... as Jesus noted in v. 18: “I saw Satan fall like lightning falls from heaven.”

While that refers to the pre-creation fall of Satan, it is also expressive of Jesus's impression of the victories claimed by the 70.

You also have to take into consideration the situation into which Jesus sent the 70. Read vv. 3-8. They were going to be like lambs walking among wolves. They were to carry no backpack, money, or extra shoes. They were to eat and drink whatever was offered them. All of this invites the enemy to try to sabotage their mission and to do them whatever harm they can inflict upon them. They could have been assassinated with venomous reptiles, scorpions, or spiders by those who invited them to temporarily lodge with them.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ referred to the Scribes and Pharisees as being vipers (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). It would not be beyond possibility that Jesus was congratulating the 70 for their successful mission into the territories dominated by the Scribes and Pharisees (Luke 10:19).

Luke 10:20 is also particularly interesting in this matter: "Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you." Yet, I have seen snake handlers, poison drinkers, demon fighters, and so on rejoice and dance around in a frenzy at supposedly having put Satan "on the run." And ... I know that some snake handlers and poison drinkers have died as a result of their practice. The successful ones mourn their deaths, but attribute their failures to a lack of true faith.

Read Acts 28:1-6. Here Paul and his company were befriended by some local non-Greek people who were gathering firewood so they could make a fire to keep themselves warm and dry. Paul pitched in to gather some sticks. A venomous snake came out of the heated area and got its fangs stuck into Paul's hand when it bit him. It was apparent to the bystanders that Paul was as good as dead—so they assumed that Paul was some foul fellow who deserved to die for whatever transgressions he had committed.

Paul, unfazed by the incident, simply shook the snake loose into the fire and continued as though nothing had happened. When his hand did not swell up and he did not die, the non-Greeks thought he was a god. You do not see Paul dancing and shouting and claiming victory over Satan after this incident. He went about his business and did not pay attention to being considered as a god.

Now read the rest of the information in vv. 7-9. What did Paul do for the father of his host Publius? Did he also lay hands on others in that area? Does it seem to you that the laying on of hands was widely practiced by God's true ministry?

Finally, read Acts 19:11. What is the source of power that supports God's true ministry? Verse 12 tells us an unusual thing that Paul did, trusting God's power of intervention, when he was either too busy or unable to personally lay hands upon those who requested that he would do so. He anointed handkerchiefs and pieces of aprons and sent them to those needing healing. Diseases were healed and demons were cast out. Verse 11 rightly gives credit to the power of God for intervening in these situations.

This is practiced by The Seventh Day Christian Assembly and other similar ministries throughout the world. I use pieces of new, clean, white handkerchiefs. In the process, I anoint them with virgin olive oil and lay hands upon them while praying for God's intervention through Jesus Christ.

If you ever need such intervention, please get in touch with me and make your request—realizing, of course, that the healing comes from God, not from me. Your faith also plays an important role in this matter. I will send instructions about how to use the anointed cloth.

## Review Questions

1. Mark 6:1-6 – Where was Jesus at this time? Why was Je-



sus not able to do mighty works there?

2. Why did Jesus marvel at this? How did He effect the healing of the few who were healed?

3. What would you conclude from this example about one's attitude interfering with God's will and power regarding one's healing?

4. Mark 7:31-37 – What was the problem with which Jesus was confronted? What did the people ask Jesus to do? So, it included laying on of hands? Would you consider Jesus' method in this case bizarre or grotesque? What possible benefit could there be in touching someone's tongue with your spit and poking your fingers into his ears?

6. Did Jesus make a great show in front of the people who were gathered there? What did He do instead? So, the multitude saw the results of what Jesus did and not the action itself?

7. Mark 16:15-20 – To whom does Jesus supposedly address this instruction? How do vv. 1-16 compare to Matthew 28 and Luke 24:44-49? Do Matthew and Luke contain instruction about laying on of hands, handling poisonous snakes, and drinking poison? What do such things teach you?

8. Luke 10:16-19 – To whom does Jesus Christ address this instruction? Is it similar to Mark 16:15-20? So, this is instruction, in effect, to Christ's ministry? For what reason?

9. Acts 28:1-6 – Did the Apostle Paul play with the viper until it bit him? So, this was an accident? Was Paul totally unharmed by this venomous bite? Could you give a possible reason for Paul's escape from certain death?

10. In vv. 7-10, did Paul also lay hands upon the sick? What was the result?

11. What do you suppose would have happened if an enemy had given Paul a poisonous drink in order to get rid of him and the work he was doing for Jesus Christ? Do you understand Mark 16:15-20 better now because of these examples?

12. Acts 19:11, 12 – What did Paul send to those whom he could not personally visit? Would you assume that Paul anointed these cloths with oil and laid hands upon them as he prayed for the people to whom they were to be sent? Explain your answer.

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# Chapter Six

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## Laying on of Hands: Ordination

Ordination is the means by which an individual is set aside, or admitted, to the various levels of the ministry or to the priesthood. Laying on of hands is employed in most ceremonies of ordination. We should understand what God’s word reveals about how the individuals who represent Him are to be set aside for the true ministry.

Let’s begin with Numbers 8:5-22. Pay close attention to what is actually happening in this ceremony. God is *redeeming* [exchanging one thing for another] the Levites from among the 12 tribes of Israel to be the *priests*. Up to this point, the common practice was for the head of the household—the *firstborn*—to be the “priests” of the family.

Notice vv. 17-19 where God made the statement that He *sanctified* (i.e.: set aside for holy purposes) the *firstborn* during the Passover preceding the Exodus. Verse 18 says that He *substituted the tribe of Levi for all of the firstborn of Israel*. This is referred to as a *redemption* (see also Exodus 34:18-20; Leviticus 25:23-34 for other examples).

Verses 19, 24, and 25 show that the *Levites* would, thereafter, serve in the Tabernacle as various levels of priests from the age of 25 years old to 50 years old. After the age of 50, they would serve among the people in the Tent of the Congregation.

In other scriptures, you can learn that the Levites got no

land inheritance like the other tribes did. They were also distributed among the other tribes to serve as teachers, judges, and priests. The tithes and portions of the sacrifices were their assigned inheritance, instead of a land inheritance.

In Numbers 8:10, why did the Lord God command that the *Israelites* were to *lay hands on* the Levites? This is a *transference of power* ceremony. So, part of this ceremony allowed for the transfer of the priestly duties and authority from the firstborn of each family to the Levites. It is not made clear if each individual Israelite had to lay hands on each individual Levite. If there were 20,000 Levite males, that would have been a very long ceremony!

However, notice the importance of this ceremony:

... [T]he *children of Israel* must *put their hands upon them* (v. 10), so transferring their interest in them and in their service (to which, as a part, the whole body of the people was entitled) to God and his sanctuary. The imposition of hands by the children of Israel upon the Levites did not make them [the Levites] ministers of the sanctuary, but only signified the people's parting with that tribe out of their militia, and civil incorporations, in order to their being made ministers by *Aaron*, who was to offer them before the Lord. (Matthew Henry, *Commentary of the Whole Bible*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1982; p. 149; emphases added)

By that account, it would seem that each Israelite would have to lay hands on each Levite ... regardless of how much time it took to do so. The people gave up to *God* the entire tribe of Levi *in place of* the firstborn sons of all of the tribes. They also accepted the Lord's stipulation that the tithes of the people would thereafter also be the inheritance of the Levites *instead of a land grant* (see Num. 18:26). The Le-

vites' entire service, whether to God or the people, would be sacred. In essence, this seems more like an elaborate adoption ceremony. It was not an ordination ceremony.

Hebrews 6:2 does not go beyond "laying on of hands" to tell all of the situations to which the doctrine applies. For example: read Exodus 29. Notice the ceremony described in vv. 1-9. This is the ceremony by which Aaron and his sons were consecrated into the priest's office of service. Is there a laying on of hands in this consecration ceremony at this point? No. There is no mention in the entire chapter of laying hands on any human ... yet this is a consecration ceremony during which Aaron is made the High Priest of Israel and his sons are set aside for their priestly offices. A line of succession to the High Priest position is also established (vv. 29-35). That means that only the lineage of Aaron can be the High Priest.

Notice, however, that hands are laid upon the sacrificial animals (the bullock and the unblemished lambs; vv. 1, 10, 15, 19). This is for the transference of the sins of Aaron and his sons upon the animals (which were symbols of Jesus Christ; see Hebrews 10:1-14). All of the ceremony is to make Aaron and his sons "sinless" before the Lord God. It is a type of ordination.

In order to fully understand the problem presented by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, read Numbers 16:1-3. Pay attention to how they attempted to use their fame among the Israelite families to push their agenda. Their demand sounds like a play out of Martin Luther's handbook: "...all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: Why do you lift yourselves above the congregation?" (emphases added). Do you remember Luther's claim against the Roman Catholic authority: "Every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret scripture for himself under the leadership of the Holy Spirit" (emphases added)?

I dare say that the two situations were not the same. The “rebels” were well aware of what the Lord God had been doing among Israel. Korah was a *Levite*—a member of the priestly family, *but* he was *not* in the family of *Aaron*, the high priest. Those of *Aaron’s* family were the only ones who could be appointed as the high priest.

Notice that Aaron’s brother, Moses, could not be appointed as high priest. But ... read Exodus 4:16 and 7:1. What did the Lord God mean when He said that Moses would be “... as *God* ...” to Aaron and the Pharaoh? He was telling Moses that his authority would be higher than that Aaron, the high priest, and the Pharaoh.

Dathan and Abiram were of the tribe of *Reuben*—a *non-priestly* family, but Reuben was Jacob’s *firstborn* by his wife Leah (Gen. 29:32), which would have normally only given him a high status among the tribes of Israel. However, he committed an *egregious* sin against his father, Jacob (see Gen. 49:3, 4; 1 Chron. 5:1, 2).

The Lord God, not Moses, chose the priestly family. Moses was a Levite, but he was Aaron’s brother; therefore, not eligible to be in the Levitical Aaronic priesthood. However, he was appointed to be “as ‘God’” over Aaron (see Ex. 4:16; 7:1) ... which gave him sacred authority over Aaron, the Levitical priesthood, and Pharaoh of Egypt.

Now read Genesis 49:3, 4 and 1 Chronicles 5:1. *Reuben* lost the birthright inheritance because he had sexual relations with one of his father’s four wives: Bilhah. (Gen. 35:22). As a result of that shocking sin, Joseph, Jacob/Israel’s firstborn with his wife Rachel, was elevated to the firstborn blessing spot in the inheritance (Gen. 49:22-26).

Moses (a Levite: read Exodus 2), apparently, believed that Korah was pushing to become the high priest ... in spite of not being qualified for the office because he was not a member of *Aaron’s* family.

All of this instruction supplements the instructions re-

corded in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. All of this is also supplemented by Jeremiah 33:17-26 ... a confirmation of the eternal value of God's covenants and promises (see also Heb. 6:13-20). Were God not inclined to prove the efficacy (the ability to perform a task to a satisfactory or expected degree) of His word and covenants, then there would not be any foundation for believing that He does not lie or say one thing, but mean quite another (duplicity). As the country music song opines: If "forever" does not mean "forever," then what is "forever" for? In all of creation and existence, only God has the ability to control "forever".

Hopefully, you can understand that all of this was a type of ordination in the sense of conferring holy orders on someone, but it was not carried out by including the laying on of hands of the ministry (see Num. 8:10) ... like the New Testament situations involving the practice.

## An Old Testament Sample of Laying on of Hands

In Numbers 27:15-23 is a sample of Old Testament laying on of hands. What request did Moses make of the Lord God? He was about to die and was concerned about Israel having a leader after his death. Apparently, the Lord God had already thought about that problem because He immediately told Moses to set aside Joshua to take his place. That meant that Joshua would become "... as God ..." to the high priest.

Here is the order that the Lord God gave to Moses concerning Joshua's ordination: (1) lay hands upon him in front of Eliezer the High Priest and the congregation of Israel; (2) give Joshua a charge in the sight of Israel (v. 19) regarding his duties, responsibilities, and obligations as leader so they would not be like sheep that have no shepherd (v. 17); and (3) in doing so, put some of his own honor on Joshua to make Israel know who his successor would be and obey him.

Read Hebrews 5-8 to understand how Jesus Christ be-

came our high priest—even though He was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi ... not from Aaron's branch of the Levites. Pay attention to 5:4: “No man takes this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (emphases added).

In spite of his claims that all the congregation was holy, Korah was not appointed by God to be high priest. Verse 5 explains that even Jesus did not presume to appoint Himself to the High Priesthood, but He was appointed by God the Father. Notice that it was to the order of Melchisedec (King of Salem; read Genesis 14:17-20), not to the order of Levi, that Jesus was appointed. Hebrews 7 explains how and why the change of the priesthood was made. Verse 16 explains that the difference is that Levi was assigned by the law as a temporary priesthood, while Melchisedec is “after the power of endless life”—that is, it is an eternal priesthood.

The pregnant (“full of meaning”) point of this example is that God’s true ministry is appointed by God. They are “called” into that office and given a charge to preach and teach God’s unadulterated truth. They are to be shepherds to God’s True Church. And, sadly enough, there are many so-called ministers who have taken this office upon themselves and have no business being in that position.

## A New Testament Sample of Laying on of Hands

Read carefully 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15. What is Paul’s reason for warning us about this problem? Was there a problem with false ministers? In whose service were they really acting? With the present-day existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, should we be concerned today about a similar problem?

It should be obvious that false Christs, false spirits, and false gospels can lead people very far astray from God’s truth. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 24:4, 5 when He



spoke of many coming in His name preaching false messages about Him and, in some cases, even claiming to be Him (see also Matt. 7:13, 14). Even in Matthew 24:24, He warns of false Christs and false prophets doing wonders and signs to convince people to follow them.

In the Revelation to the Apostle John, He warned that a false prophet will be involved with the end-time Beast power (13:11-17). That false prophet will administer the infamous “mark of the Beast” and hold great power over the earth at that time (Rev. 13:11-17). No doubt, he will support the “Beast” who will attempt to pass himself off as the Christ.

Why do I use this to introduce this section about a New Testament sample of laying on of hands? First, it has to do with Paul’s declaration in Ephesians 4 about the unity of the True Church. In that declaration, Paul shows how one can differentiate God’s true Church from the imposters who will be in the majority ... especially those like the False Prophet of Revelation 13:11-17. Second, it enables you to avoid the practices like those of Matthew 7:13-27 who will come in Jesus Christ’s name and do all manner of “Christian” works only to be denied entrance into God’s Kingdom. Is it worth your time and effort to learn those things?

That said, let’s first study through Ephesians 4:1-16. Verse 3 points out that our primary task is “to keep the unity of the [true] faith in the bond of peace.” What does the term bond mean? It has to do with a relationship between people or groups based on shared feelings, interests, or experiences. Relative to what? Those who make up the True Church of God ... as opposed to the imposters (read 1 Tim 3:15). How does that work?

Read carefully vv. 4-6. Pay attention to the identifying marker “one”. Now pay attention to those things that are to be “one” in meaning and truth: body, Spirit, hope of your calling, Lord, faith, baptism, and God-and-Father [who is a separate entity from the “Lord”]. How does that relate to vv.

11-13?

God-and-Father and the Lord have called out various levels of ministerial authority to educate God's true people to spiritual maturity and spiritual unity. They are ultimately to become as spiritually mature as Jesus Christ ("Until we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fully grown, mature, spiritual adult"). In other words, God wants His people to fully attain the purpose of their calling into His truth by becoming spiritually complete like Christ did in His human form. Why?

Read vv. 14, 15 very carefully. Verse 14 implies that there are those who fall prey to the following: (1) spiritual confusion, (2) a wide variety of conflicting doctrines and teachings, and (3) those who come in Christ's name with deceptive "Spiritual" messages (see also 2 Cor. 11:1-4, 13-15). Ephesian 4:15 says that our task as God's true people is to speak His truth in love and grow spiritually in the pattern of Jesus Christ. Again: Why?

Ephesians 4:16 says that Jesus Christ is the "head" of His "body" (that is: the True Church; read also Eph. 5:22-33). The "members" of His body must work together in spiritual unity like the various parts of the human body work together. That analogy in no way implies that 32,000+ "Christian" denominations represent the "body" of Christ. There is too much conflict in doctrines, traditions, and practices. It implies that we have knowledge of, in plain sight, where the "many" can be found ... as opposed to the "few" (see Matt. 7:14-29). If we can identify the "many", then we can know what to avoid ... and whether or not the laying on of hands that they might have had is of any spiritual value relative to God's truth.

Now look at Jude 4. Jude is the brother of Jesus Christ. His letter is short, but to the point, about the responsibilities of God's true ministers to protect God's Church from heretics who come in to stealthily lead its members astray from

God's truth. He explicitly says at the end of v. 3 that God's true people should be taught to "...earnestly contend for the [true] faith that was once [and for all time] delivered unto the saints." The laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit is a serious matter and should not be taken lightly because it is by that unifying Spirit that we become one in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:6-12 gives us a vivid picture of the seriousness of the matter. It is especially critical to understand that you are not "once saved, always saved" merely by your confession of faith in Jesus Christ. If you have believed a false concept regarding a "Jesus Christ," then you have no "holy ground" upon which to stand (2 Cor. 11:1-15).

Do not misunderstand that statement. You have been shown the scriptural premise upon which it is based. If you take it outside of that premise, then you will/can certainly fall into a spiritual "trap" from which it is difficult to be freed (see Prov. 4:1-13; 14:12; 15:28).

Is it yet clear to you that the individual is called to be a member of a unified body of believers who worship God in spirit and in truth? Is it also clear that, because the Levitical priesthood was not incorporated into the New Testament Church (see Heb. 3:1-6; 5:1-10), God still needed men who would act on His behalf to educate and shepherd His people (Eph. 4:8-16)? That God Himself would appoint them? Would it make sense to you that those who are appointed by God to be His ministers will also be the ones appointed by God to lay hands on those seeking membership in His True Church.

Among the 32,000+ "Christian" denominations, many of them lay hands on those whom they baptize, sprinkle, or "anoint" by pouring. Your task is to be able to identify God's True Church. As plainly stated in many different ways: it will be found among the few, not the many.

## Review Questions

1. Numbers 8:5-22 – How is this different from Exodus 29? Does it suggest that lay members have the authority to lay hands on ministers for ordination purposes? Explain.
2. Numbers 27:15-23 – What request did Moses make of the Lord God? Why did he make this request? Why did the Lord God tell Moses to “...lay your hand upon him...give him a charge in their sight...And ... put some of your honor upon him” (emphasis added)?
3. Numbers 16 – Read the entire chapter carefully, making note of the problem that Korah, Dathan, and Abiram presented to Moses in v. 3. What was their claim when they said “All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them”? Of what does Moses accuse Korah in vv. 9, 10? How did God settle this dispute?
4. 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15 – What is Paul’s reason for warning us about this problem? Was there a problem with false ministers? In whose service were they really acting? With the existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, why should we be concerned?
5. Jude 4 – Should God’s True Church be concerned about imposters coming among them to lead them astray from God’s truth (read also Galatians 1:6-12)? Why? (See John 4:23, 24 to help frame your answer.)
6. Ephesians 4:11-16 – List three responsibilities of God’s ministers and the reasons why they are charged with those responsibilities. What does this have to do with vv. 4-6? If every so-called “priest under Jesus Christ” is doing his own thing, can that kind of unity (oneness) ever be achieved? Ex-

plain your answer.

7. What does the following comment mean: “No individual Christian makes a Church”? Is it clear yet that the individual is called to be a member of a ***unified*** body of believers who worship God in spirit and in truth? Is it also clear that, once the Levitical priesthood was set aside, God still needed men who would act on His behalf to educate and shepherd His people? That God Himself would appoint them?

8. 1 Corinthians 3 – Read the entire chapter. If God’s true ministry is appointed by God Himself, what should our attitude be toward such men? Can we lightly disregard them if they are speaking God’s truth to educate and guide us? Should we be willing to listen only to those that we personally like? Why?

9. 2 Timothy 2:15 – Remembering that this is a pastoral letter reminding Timothy of his duties as a minister of God, why should God’s true ministers devote time to studying God’s word? In vv. 17, 18, what was the great error being taught by Hymeneus and Philetus? Why were they a danger to God’s Church?

10. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 – What other great problems will God’s true ministers find among those who claim to be of the true faith? Would you agree, then, that God’s true ministers need to be given an extra measure of God’s Holy Spirit to be able to confront and disprove all of the false doctrines that arise among those claiming to be “Christians”?

11. Write a brief explanation of why God’s true ministers are: (a) appointed by God Himself and (b) are to have hands laid upon them by men who have been similarly ordained. What great benefit is that to God’s Church? Be as complete

as possible.

12. Are God's ministers considered to be priests at present?  
Are they anywhere called that?

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# Chapter Seven

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## Laying on of Hands: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

**M**any in radio and television ministries miss the point about receiving the Holy Spirit *in the manner that God's word requires of us*. Simply believing in Jesus Christ does not automatically bring upon you the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand this because of what Paul said in Romans 8:9: "You are not controlled by the flesh, but by the Spirit, ***if*** the Spirit of God dwells in you. But *anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ in him does not belong to Him*" (emphases added).

The point is quite simple: Do things the way **God** reveals them—or, you will be putting your eternal life into jeopardy. Let's see what God has revealed in His word by reading Acts 2:38.

What three things does Peter say must be done *initially* by those who want their sins forgiven? Repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. Your first thought might well be that the laying on of hands is not mentioned. As far as that part of scripture is concerned, you would be correct.

However, if you remember BSC #1, you will know what two lessons covered: (1) knowing the issue and (2) understanding the entire matter. The answer to the quandary (the perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in this seemingly difficult situation) is that you search scripture for more information—if it exists. When you read beyond Acts 2:38, the

story involves the readiness with which those in the audience requested to be baptized.

## Beyond Acts 2:38

How many did this as Peter commanded (v. 41)? About 3,000. Do you imagine that the 12 disciples had time for long, drawn-out ceremonies for laying hands upon all those people after baptism? That is a fair and obvious question.

I have read commentaries that suggest that there were too many people for the disciples to follow through with all of the requirements—maybe leaving off the laying on of hands. Some suggest that they did not lay on hands because that is not mentioned in the Acts 2:38 account. Here you have a *conundrum*—a seemingly difficult problem that requires a sensible answer.

If God *requires* the laying on of hands after baptism, can one reasonably *omit* such a requirement because of other seemingly overwhelming, pressing needs? What would be *your* answer in the face of Matthew 19:26: “Things that are *impossible* for man are *possible* for God”? By that piece of holy reasoning, it would be reasonable to assume that all 3,000 had hands laid upon them after baptism. How?

Actually, it would have taken less time for the laying on of hands than for the baptisms. If some of the disciples baptized and some laid on hands, they could have done their job quite efficiently and successfully—but it still would have taken several hours to complete it. Those doing the baptisms could have easily and quickly laid hands on those baptized. Conferring the gift of Holy Spirit on someone does not demand a long, drawn-out ceremony.

Considering the seriousness of the occasion, I suspect that they were in no hurry to leave. If necessary, they would have waited until the next day. That answer, however, is what is called *presupposition*: something assumed or taken



for granted in advance.

Presupposition is not simply guessing. It is a conclusion that is based on other known factors that possibly relate to the matter under discussion. Go back to Acts 2:1 and read it again. What is the significance of this day of Pentecost? What happened to the people?

What does the book of *Joel* have to do with it? To what does the Acts 2 experience bear witness (see especially v. 37-41)? The Acts 2 experience was a unique situation in the revelation of what a portion of the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy will be like. But ... was it the actual, complete fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32 as it seems to be suggested by Peter? Let's see.

Read Joel 2:28-32. Make note of what the entire prophetic experience will entail. Note especially v. 28: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh...". Did that happen in Acts 2? No. There were only 3,000 people who were baptized that day. Also note Joel 2:30, 31. Did any of that happen in Acts 2? No ... only a great rushing wind and cloven tongues of fire not addressed by Joel (Acts 2:2, 3).

Note also Acts 2:14-20. Did Peter cite Joel's prophecy as an explanation of what was occurring? Yes. Unless there is another reasonable explanation for Peter's actions, this appears to be a gross error on his part. If that is true, one would wonder if Peter was led by Holy Spirit to draw such a conclusion. Why do we have John 20:22 showing Jesus Christ blowing breath on His disciples before Acts 2 – approximately 50 days before Acts 2?

What happened when Peter explained the situation to them according to the scriptures they had at the time? Now read v. 37. Does the question the crowd posed signal that they still had some spiritual "business" to pursue? Does v. 38 suggest that the brief experience with being affected by Holy Spirit pointed only to the three things of which Peter spoke: repentance, baptism, receipt of Holy Spirit?

Here is another angle to consider in this conundrum: In v. 38, Peter said that they would "...receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The answer of true faith would conclude that, by one means or another, they did ... and they received it by the laying on of the hands of the Apostles during the same day they were baptized.

So, Peter used Joel's prophecy to explain the existence of the gift of Holy Spirit after baptism and laying on of hands ... not to declare that *the day of the Lord* was then at hand. Read the scriptures Peter cited after his remark about Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:22-36). All of them were used to explain what had happened and why.

### Acts 6:1-8

This incident raises some important questions: What conflict arose among the new Christian sect? How was it settled? What qualifications were the selected men to have? Were they ordained to the ministry assigned them? How can you tell?

This is generally accepted as the ordination of the first deacons. Some denominations do not consider deacons to be in the ranks of the ministry. Some ordain them for only a specified period of time—and only if they are elected by the congregation. It is clear from this account that the congregation was instructed to select them.

The 12 Apostles gave the congregation instructions about what to do: Select seven (7) men filled with the Holy Spirit and holy wisdom to take care of the day-to-day business matters of the congregation. You can also see in v. 12 that "... a great company of [Levitical] priests had also been converted to the true faith. Their knowledge and experience certainly proved to be useful. All of this motley crowd lived together in a type of "Christian" commune. So, they had to operate in decency and order.

Is it always necessary for this type of selection process of deacons to be the practice? No. Deacons can be appointed by various means: congregations, committees, deacon boards, and ministers. But ... their ordination constitutes a lower level of God's ministry that takes care of the day-to-day business of a given Church congregation—which frees the pastor and other ministers to carry out the teaching and preaching of God's word (the education and training of the congregation).

## Acts 8

In Acts 8:5, we see that Philip (not the Apostle; see Matt. 10:2-5 and Acts 6:5) preached the gospel in the city of Samaria (the capitol city of the House of Israel; less than 100 miles north of Jerusalem; I Kings 16:23, 24). Acts 8:5-17 explains a problem with Philip's ministry: He apparently knew nothing about the laying on of hands after baptism. If he did, he did not employ it.

In vv. 14-17, we read that the Apostles in Jerusalem heard of Philip's work. They sent Peter and John to investigate. They found that none of Philip's converts had received the Holy Spirit; so, they prayed for them and laid hands on them.

One might well assume that Philip, thereafter, received a timely education in baptizing and the laying on of hands ... although Acts 8:26-39 does not show him laying hands on the Ethiopian eunuch after baptizing him. The silence there does not mean that he did not do so; it was not mentioned. Sometimes the biblical record does not give every detail of situations that occur. We cannot assume that it did not happen.

In vv. 18-24, a converted sorcerer named Simon Magus had been baptized by Philip. It appears that he later observed Peter and John laying hands on the other converts and want-

ed to have that power also. He offered them money for it, but Peter rebuked him and refused to give him the power, as well as, apparently, to lay hands on him for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. This attempt to buy a Church office has come to be known as *simony*.

## Acts 9:1-22

This is a description of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus ... a serious enemy of early Christianity. It is patently obvious that his conversion was not a matter experienced by the average Christian then or now. Can you imagine the experience of being surrounded by a bright light from heaven? On top of that, a voice coming down from heaven asking why he had been persecuting the heavenly personage making the inquiry? What was he told to do in v. 6? Merely to go into the nearby city and wait to be told what to do. He was so shaken by the experience that he was blind and did not eat or drink for three days. This is called “the Damascus Road” experience.

In vv. 10-22, we see that the Lord God (Jesus Christ) sent a Christian disciple named Ananias to visit with Saul ... and put Ananias on notice that Saul was informed that he would visit him (v.15).

Because of Saul’s reputation for severely persecuting Christians, Ananias was not overly eager to visit with even a blind, stunned henchman. Christ assured him that Saul was now a “chosen vessel” for God’s work among the Jewish and Gentile Christians ... which, at that time, were a small religious sect of Judaism (Acts 15:4, 5; 24:5; 28:22).

What did Christ instruct Ananias to do with Saul? Verse 12 says that Christ had told Saul that Ananias was coming to lay hands on him in order to restore his sight. As that event unfolded more in vv. 17, 18, we learn that Saul was also baptized and given the gift of Holy Spirit.

In this case, Saul was given the gift of Holy Spirit first

and baptized afterwards. Do not let the search for an *exact* process formula confuse you. It could be argued that a person must have a certain level of Holy Spirit in order to understand God's truth to the point of making the rational decision to become a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) and others argued such a *prevenient grace* (grace that precedes and prepares one for conversion) several years before various forms of it were adopted by the Roman Church and others. It is apparent from John 6:44, 65 that one must be drawn by God the Father to Jesus Christ *before* they can be converted and ultimately saved. Augustine was not the originator of that idea.

### Acts 18:24-28

Make note that Apollos was preaching God's truth. He was eloquent and fervent, and he had many converts among the Jews. Regardless of these things, we are about to discover that there was something lacking in his approach that needed to be corrected: he was practicing *John's* baptism of repentance.

When Paul left Ephesus to go to other regions like Caesarea and Antioch, Apollos came to Ephesus to preach in the synagogue there. A man and his wife, Aquila and Priscilla, they took him aside for some vital instruction to which he was not yet privy. That included the understanding about the new "Christian" baptism and laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. They also reported his progress to the Disciples so they could be aware of the progress Apollo was making in understanding the true gospel, baptism, laying on of hands, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process.

### Acts 19:1-6

At the time Apollos was in Corinth, apparently *before* he

was tutored by Aquila and Priscilla, Paul came to Ephesus and discovered that some new converts had been baptized by Apollos, but had not received the Holy Spirit. They even remarked that they did not even know there was such a teaching (v. 2). That is when Paul discovered that Apollos practiced John the Baptist's baptism of repentance. John had taught them that they afterwards should believe on Jesus Christ when He appeared on the world scene.

The net effect of this discovery by Paul was that these people were rebaptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and Paul laid hands on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

The main point of this entire discussion is to demonstrate the validity of the true New Testament baptism and laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. It is required in God's True Church in the manner taught in the New Testament.

## Review Questions

1. Acts 8:5-17 – Did Philip preach the gospel and baptize converts? Did Philip lay hands on any of them? Why/why not?
2. Why did Peter and John go to Samaria (vv. 14-17)? Why had none of these converts received the Holy Spirit?
3. Acts 6:1-8 – What conflict arose among the new Christian sect? How was it settled? What qualifications were the men to have? Were they ordained to the ministry assigned them? How can you tell?
4. Acts 9:1-9 – Does this describe the conversion of the Apostle Paul, who was formerly known as Saul of Tarsus? What happened to him as a result of the bright light that enveloped him?

5. Verses 10-22 – Whom did God send to help Saul? Was he eager to do what the Lord told him to do? Why/why not? Did he lay hands on Saul? Was Saul healed? Did Saul receive the Holy Spirit? Was Saul baptized? In which order did it occur?

6. Acts 18:24-28 – Was Apollos very knowledgeable about the scriptures? Did he teach the things of the Lord? What kind of baptism did he practice? Did he preach Jesus as the Christ? How did he get integrated into the true Christian faith and practices?

7. Acts 19:1-6 – What basic question about the Holy Spirit did Paul ask some converts that he found in Ephesus? What was their answer? What basic question did Paul ask them about their baptism? What was their answer? What was the problem with John the Baptist's baptism? How did Paul correct it? Does this inform us that some forms of baptism are not accepted and re-baptism must be performed?

8. What valuable lessons have you learned from this study?





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# Summary

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We have seen the four purposes for laying on of hands, which is revealed in God's word as one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1, 2): blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. It is important for us to understand why God uses the methods He uses to accomplish things that He wills for His people.

John 4:1, 2 shows that Jesus Christ "made and baptized more disciples than John," but Jesus Himself had His disciples do the actual baptizing. The baptism required by Jesus Christ was different from John's in two important ways: (a) there was the promise of salvation and (b) there was the promise of the Holy Spirit – which *they* did not actually receive until after Jesus had ascended to the Father as the wave sheaf offering

Some accounts in Acts show that God gave the Holy Spirit *before* baptism so that He could show that He accepted certain unusual people into His Church. Since Ananias was skeptical about Saul, God gave Saul the Holy Spirit as a sign to Ananias that he was now God's servant.

Read Acts 10 to understand what the entire situation mentioned there was really about: the Jewish prejudice against Gentiles (vv. 28, 34-36). In vv. 44-48, it shows that God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit as a seal of His approval – then Peter baptized them. This event has nothing to do with doing away with the law of unclean meats (Lev. 11; 20:25; Deut. 14:1-21).

John 20:22 shows Jesus breathing upon His disciples and saying to them: "Receive a holy spirit" (Anchor Bible) – which corresponds to Genesis 2:7 as though He was breath-

ing life into a new creation. The more general gift of the Holy Spirit upon “sons and daughters” (as opposed to just the disciples) did not come until Pentecost – which Peter describes as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (compare Acts 2:16-21 to Joel 2:28-32).

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5 that *baptism* and *receipt of the Holy Spirit* are necessary for salvation. So, it would stand to reason that Jesus’ baptism contained elements that John’s did not; therefore, re-baptism and laying on of hands for receipt of the Holy Spirit were necessary for those who were baptized by John the Baptist.

It also would stand to reason that there are many who have similarly fallen prey to things that are not part of the truth of God – namely, the means by which one begins the *salvation process*. This can include the type of “baptism” one receives and whether or not hands were laid upon them by one of God’s *true* ministers.

It can also include whether or not this was conducted by God’s True Church as opposed to some of the imposters who preach and teach falsehoods in the name of Jesus Christ. With that understanding, Paul set about correcting a problem that existed at that time – a problem that exists to this very day.

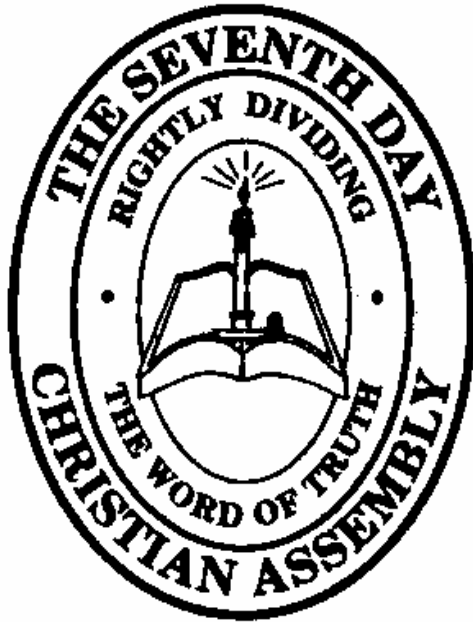
We should not shrink back from the required practices because we consider them to be weird or unnecessary. They are what they are because *God* has made them mandatory. We are not privileged to second guess Him or to denigrate them in any manner because of our own lack of understanding or unwillingness to obey Him.

I hope that you have learned valuable lessons in the true faith in this study. The next lesson will cover the different resurrections from the dead ... a concept of which you might not be aware.









## **Straight Talk ... Plain Truth**

**THIS BOOK IS NOT TO BE SOLD**

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